

JEEVADHARA

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IMAGE OF THE CHURCH

JESUS AND SERVICE

George Mangatt

THE UNIFYING CHURCH

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IMAGE OF THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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The People of God

IMAGE OF THE CHURCH

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Editorial

What is the image of the Church? Vatican II gives the answer calling it "a sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind". In this volume of *Jeevadharma* we are making a modest attempt to understand and appreciate the true image of the Church.

The Church which is on her pilgrimage needs a constant awareness of her true image and mission. It has to stand the strain of the various vicissitudes of human history remaining always faithful to its vocation. The Church is sublime in her goal, but always weak in her members. This tension between the sublime goal and the trials of time constitutes her history. She cannot and should not make a step forward without having an adequate understanding and awareness of her specific role in human history. The history of the Pilgrim Church reveals her successes and failures in facing the challenges of the time.

During this post-Conciliar period of renewal and revival of the Church it is our duty to focus our attention on the true image of the Church. The recent ecclesiological studies and post-Conciliar developments have made a great contribution towards a better understanding of the image of the Church in the world of today. But, at the same time, one cannot fail to observe that these deep insights have not adequately permeated the life of the Church as a whole. The Church loses its essence and becomes impoverished when the spirit of men dominates it instead of the Spirit of Jesus. The life in the Spirit is the supreme goal of the Church. The Holy Spirit is the life-giving source. The Church has to be constantly warned of the danger of falling into a man-made organization. The Spiritual Life, that is, the real life in the Holy Spirit, alone can save the Church. It demands a real change from all, from the Pastors as well as from the flock. It requires real renunciation and genuine renewal of life. There should be equal emphasis on the doctrine as well as on the life. Preaching and teaching without an evangelical life make the message inconsistent!

This volume of *Jeevadhara* on the Image of the Church begins with an analysis of the servant Church by George Mangatt. Christ came to serve and his followers also have to be at the service of humanity. Then follows E. R. Hambye's description of the Church's image as historically projected. Xavier Koodapuzha studies the unifying role of the Church and George Punchakunnel treats of the Praying Church. Antony Thannikott discusses the various aspects of the Liberating Church. The last study by Mathew Vellanickal is a scriptural analysis of the Image of the Church in the New Testament.

Though I have no intention to claim this study as an extensive and exhaustive one, I hope it will be useful to have a general idea of the Image of the Church. I wish to express my sincere thanks to all those who have generously contributed these articles and helped in various ways to prepare this volume.

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Jesus and Service

I. The Gospels abundantly testify that Jesus conceived his messianic mission as eminently one of service. Jesus' answer to the question of John the Baptist "Are You he who is to come....?" (Mt 11: 2-6; Lk 7: 18-23) expresses this conception in a striking way. John, imprisoned by Herod, had heard about "the deeds of the Christ" (Mt 11: 2). In Matthew's Gospel these "deeds" are Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God and his healing and liberating activity, which he began after John was imprisoned by Herod (Mt 4: 12, 17). The narratives of these deeds of Christ in chapters 4-10 are framed by an inclusion, Mt 4: 23-25 / 9: 35-36: "And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people..."

John was expecting a glorious Messiah, "a mightier one" coming in power and majesty as sovereign judge to condemn and to destroy the wicked and to give the baptism of the Spirit and the fire (cf. Mt 3: 7-12). Inspired by the prophecy of Isaiah 40: 3 John understood himself as the forerunner of the Lord, whose mission was preparing His coming (Mt 3: 3 par.). Isaiah 40 speaks of the glorious coming of the Lord: "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together" (v. 5). "Behold, the Lord God comes with might and his arm rules for him" (v. 10; cf. Mt 3: 11: 'the mightier one'). John illustrates the might of the Lord with two figures: "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire... His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Mt 3: 10, 12). Even the figure 'baptism with the Spirit and fire' perhaps indicates a warning of judgment. It is clear that John was announcing the imminence of the hour of judgment. The one who comes after him would execute judgment against those who refuse to hear the announcement of the precursor and to repent.

Jesus' conception of his mission is very different. It is true that Jesus' mission has a glorious aspect which he will reveal during his trial before the High Priest: "I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mt 26: 64 par.). But to John the Baptist Jesus reveals his earthly mission and its eschatological significance. Jesus answers in Mt 11: 4-5 that his messianic activity ("the deeds of the Christ" v. 2) reveals his identity as the one who is to come. The list of works in vv. 4-5 generalizes concrete facts already narrated in the Gospel: the blind receive sight (cf. Mt 9: 27-31); the lame walk (9:1-8); lepers are cleansed (8: 1-4); the dead are raised (9: 23-26); the poor have the good news preached to them (cf. Mt 4: 23; 5: 3ff.).

But John's question is not whether Jesus is accomplishing extraordinary deeds (about this he has already heard, cf. v. 2), but whether he is the one who is to come. Jesus' words, however, contain the answer, because these are precisely the works prophesied by the prophet Isaiah as signs of the messianic age (cf. Is 35: 5-6; 26: 19; 29: 18f.; 61: 1 ff.). It is to be noted that in his inaugural sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus used the quotation from Is 61: 1ff. to announce the program of his mission (Lk 4: 18f.). Even Isaiah 40, on which John the Baptist (Mt 3: 3f. par.) depended for the conception of his mission, speaks of the consoling function of the Lord who is coming: "He will feed his flock like a shepherd... he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Is 40: 11).

Jesus has drawn inspiration from these prophecies of Isaiah. Jesus' answer in Mt 11: 4-5 reveals that he is really the one who is to come. But his mission, in fulfilment of the prophecies of Isaiah consists in humble service of the sick and the enslaved, the poor and the afflicted, the publicans and the sinners and the outcastes, in giving them healing and liberation and in proclaiming to them the good news of God's Kingdom and the pardon of sins. Jesus comes not to judge but to serve and to save. It is not the hour of judgment and wrath, but of mercy, forgiveness and love of God manifested in Jesus.

The concluding warning-beatitude: "And blessed is he who takes no offence at me" (Mt 11: 6) is significant in our context

Perhaps John would have some difficulty in accepting Jesus' conception of his mission, because it is so different from his own expectation of the coming of a majestic judge meting out divine judgment and wrath against the wicked and the unrepentent. This might severely test his faith in Jesus. It is John's hour of crisis and scandal. Jesus encourages him in v. 6.

The evangelist Matthew emphasizes the theme of Jesus' service by assimilating Jesus' messianic work with that of the Servant of Jahweh of the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah. Mt 8: 1-16 illustrates Jesus' healing activity with the narratives of the healing of a leper (8: 2-4); of the paralyzed servant of the centurion (vv. 5-13); of Peter's mother-in-law (vv. 14f.); of many sick and possessed persons (v. 16). As a concluding theological reflection, introduced in his characteristic style with a 'formula quotation' ("This was to fulfil..."), Matthew says that all this healing activity of Jesus was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah about the suffering Servant of Jahweh in the fourth song of the Servant, Is 53: 4: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases". In the context of Is 53 the verse refers to the vicarious sufferings of the Servant (a theme which Jesus used to express the meaning of his suffering, cf. below). Here Matthew applies it to Jesus' healing activity, suggesting new implications of the Servant soteriology. Jesus assumes the salvific and liberating role of the Servant even before his passion and death, already in the humble messianic activity during his public life.

In 12: 15-21 Matthew takes up again the theme of the Servant of Jahweh to interpret Jesus' actions, quoting the first song of the Servant, Is 42: 1-4. It is the longest O. T. citation in the Gospel of Matthew; this shows the importance Matthew attributed to the ideas expressed in it. According to Matthew, the humble and unassuming ways in which Jesus accomplished his mission were dictated by God's will revealed in prophecy. The context refers the citation to two facts. Jesus quietly withdrew (Mt 12: 5), when he faced opposition to his mission from the Jewish authorities (12: 1-14). This withdrawal or flight, however, did not mean abandonment of his mission; the next words in v. 15 speak of Jesus' universal healing activity. But he forbade those whom he healed to publicize his healing activity. Unlike Mark who interprets Jesus' prohibitions against publish-

ing his miracles in the light of the messianic secret theory, Matthew shows in it Jesus' preoccupation to avoid conflict with his opponents. Jesus' flight and the prohibition are interpreted by Matthew as fulfilment of Is 42: 1-4, which speaks of the mission and ways of the Servant. The Servant, endowed with God's Spirit, has a universal mission "of bringing justice to victory" (Mt 12: 20; cf. v. 18). Not by domination or violence but by meekness and humble service will he fulfil his work. He will not enter into public disputes or conflicts or display (Mt 12: 19). That is why Jesus fled his opponents and forbade publicizing his miraculous activity. He works quietly, patiently and humbly serving the needy. That is expressed by the two figures in v. 20; "he will not break a bruised reed, or quench a smouldering wick" Jesus' work is to console, to help, to heal. It is through gentle service of the most needy and the most hopeless that the Servant will establish God's justice for all, that is, God's universal salvific will (v. 20c). Thus Matthew emphasizes that according to God's will Jesus had to fulfil his mission not through the manifestation of majesty and judgment, as John the Baptist expected (cf. above), nor through a display of signs in heaven, as the Pharisees wanted (cf. Mt 16: 1ff. par), but through meek and humble service (cf. also Mt 11: 28-30).

The theology of the Servant of Jahweh is used also in Act 10: 34-43, the catechesis of Peter at the house of Cornelius, the first gentile Christian, to interpret Jesus' earthly ministry. V. 36 speaks of Jesus "preaching the good news of peace", evoking Is 52: 7. Alluding to Is 61: 1ff., v. 38 says that God's anointing with the Holy Spirit and with power was the source of Jesus' messianic activity of healing and liberating (cf. also Act 4: 27, 30).

Mt 8: 18f. and 12: 15-21 are the only synoptic texts in which the evangelist takes the initiative to interpret Jesus' ministry by recalling the prophecy of the Servant of Jahweh. There are other texts in which Jesus himself makes use of this theme to interpret the meaning of his redemptive death.

The prophecies of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection contain allusions to the Servant theology. The first prophecy (Mk 8: 31 par.) evokes the servant's rejection, suffering and exaltation (Is 52: 13- 53: 12). The characterization of the passion as 'being

treated with contempt' recalls Is 53: 3. The expression "delivered up" used about Jesus' passion in Mk 9: 31 par; 10: 33 par; 14: 21, 41 recalls Is 53: 5, 6, 12 (LXX). The last and detailed prophecy of the passion in Mk 10: 33f. evokes Is 50: 6 (LXX): "I have submitted my back to the scourges, and my cheeks to the blows; I have not turned away my face from the shame of being spit upon".

The words uttered by Jesus over the chalice at the last supper contain clear expression of the Servant theology: "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many" (Mk 14: 24 par; cf. 1 Cor 11: 24). Jesus' conception of his death as atoning 'for many' evokes the dominant theme of Is 53. Moreover, the re-establishment of the covenant between God and his people is the task of the Servant of Jahweh according to Is 42:6 and 49: 8.

The great logion, Mk 10: 45 expresses in the most forceful way the theme of Jesus' self-sacrificing service for the redemption of men: "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". Jesus declares that his mission, the purpose of his coming, is not to be served like the worldly lords and rulers (cf. v. 43) but to serve. His whole public ministry illustrates his service. Gestures of serving his disciples at table (Lk 22: 27) and washing their feet (Jn 13: 4ff.), both typical services which slaves render to their masters, are only symbolic expressions of his spirit of service. An allusion to the Servant of Jahweh is perhaps intended by the term "to serve" in Mk 10: 45a.

The second part of the logion brings out the profound meaning of Jesus' service. Service is here interpreted as "giving life as a ransom for many". This is clearly a summary statement of the central theme of the Servant soteriology in Is 53, which reveals the redemptive meaning of the sufferings of the Servant (Is 53:5-12). Fulfilling this prophecy Jesus serves by surrendering his life as an atonement offering for countless multitudes. This is a free service; Jesus gives his life out of his personal decision. In fact the very purpose of his coming is to serve by giving his life, because it is God's will that men should be saved through his self-oblation. One is reminded of the Johannine texts which

present Jesus as the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29, 36; cf. Is 53:7) and as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:11, 17f.). This redemptive service is the climax and perfection of Jesus' service.

This understanding of Jesus' suffering and death was dear to the early Church. For example, in Act 8:26-40 the deacon Philip evangelizes the Ethiopian eunuch by interpreting the good news of Jesus in terms of the suffering servant starting with the quotation of Is 53:7-8.

The Servant of God soteriology of Deutero-Isaiah throws much light on the meaning of Jesus' mission. Jesus himself probably interpreted his mission especially his death as the fulfilment of this prophecy, and the early Church extended it to the whole of the public ministry. Accordingly, Jesus' messianic mission, the mission of establishing God's Kingdom, was a mission of service which he accomplished in deeds and words – feeding the hungry, healing the sick, liberating the possessed, forgiving sinners, and announcing the good news of the Kingdom of God to the poor and the afflicted. In all this Jesus was fulfilling his work for God's Kingdom. The supreme expression of this service was Jesus' sufferings and death through which he achieved the redemption of countless multitudes.

II. Discipleship and Service

Jesus called his disciples to share in his work for the Kingdom of God. According to Mk 3:13-19 par. Jesus chose his twelve disciples "to be with him and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons". Their communion of life with Jesus was to be fulfilled in the communion of his mission of serving men. Jesus' instruction to the disciples on the occasion of the Galilean mission reveals the basic tasks of their service: "Go to the lost sheep of Israel. And preach as you go, saying: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without pay, give without pay" (Mt 10:6-8). The disciples' mission is an extension of Jesus' service. The lost sheep of Israel for whom Jesus was sent (cf. Mt 15:24; Mk 6:34) are now entrusted to the disciples. Their mission derives from Jesus' mission. They have

to proclaim Jesus' good news of the Kingdom of God. They must, like Jesus, heal the sick etc. Mk 6:12-13 reports that the disciples actually fulfilled their mission: "So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them". Mk 6:8-9 in contrast to Mt 10:9 and Lk 9:3, allows the disciples to take a staff and to wear sandals. They must place their trust fully in the Lord and take nothing that can secure their life except what is necessary for the fulfilment of their apostolic service: a staff and sandals to reach men in the different situations of life - of sickness, of misery, of oppression by demons, and of sinfulness. In Mk 6:32-44 par. another aspect of the disciples' service is revealed: giving bread to the hungry. "You give them something to eat", Jesus told his disciples (Mk 6:37; cf 8:2f.). Feeding the hungry who are like sheep without a shepherd is Jesus' task: it is also the task of the disciples.

Four important aspects of the disciples' participation of Jesus' service have been now revealed: preaching the good news, liberating those oppressed by the demons, healing the sick and feeding the hungry. The culmination of this participation, however, is the sharing of Jesus' redemptive self-gift and sacrifice. This aspect of service is brought out by Mark's Gospel in the section on "Jesus' Way of the Passion", 8:27 - 10:52. The section is structured on Jesus' predictions of the passion, death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). The predicting characterize Jesus' way (cf. 8:27; 9:30, 33, 34) as a way of the passion. Each prediction is followed by a reaction of the disciples revealing their incomprehension and resistance (cf. 8:32; 9:32, 33f.; 10:32, 35-37, 41), which in each case is followed by some instruction on discipleship and service (8:34-38; 9:35-50; 10:38-45), developing the theme that Christian discipleship is a sharing in Jesus' mission. The mission as the climaxing statement of the section (10:45) solemnly says, is one of redemptive service. The lesson which Mark wants to convey to his Christian community is that a Christology of service demands an Ecclesiology of service: the Church of the Servant Christ should be a Servant Church. Apparently Mark's Church showed reluctance to accept this conclusion, and Mark is trying to win the Church over to Jesus' way of service by narrating the reluctance of the first disciples and Jesus' insistent exhortation to service.

Peter's rejection of a suffering Messiah (Mk 8:32) prefigures the refusal of the Christian Church to live by the standard of the cross. Jesus' warning to Peter to live not by the standards of men but by the standards of God (v. 33) and his teaching in the following verses that discipleship means self-denial and following Jesus on his way of the cross (vv. 34ff.) are addressed equally to the Church. For, if the service of the Kingdom of God in the service of man meant for Jesus the way of the cross it can mean nothing else for the Church. This service is not possible without total self-denial and a daring love of the cross.

After the second prophecy of the passion (Mk 9:31), the disciples were discussing with one another "Who was the greatest?" Jesus taught them: "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (v. 35). After the third prophecy of the passion also we find a similar situation and teaching. James and John revealed their ambition by requesting seats of honour in Jesus' glory (10:37). The other disciples also revealed similar ambition by their indignation at James and John (v. 41); and Jesus taught his disciples: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:42-45). These verses teach a kenotic ecclesiology or a servant ecclesiology. The disciples who were thinking and planning according to the standards of the world, of power and self-glorification are warned by Jesus: "It shall not be so among you". Unlike worldly rulers, the disciples must serve just as Jesus himself came to serve. If Jesus' work is essentially service, discipleship, which is sharing in Jesus' work, demands service. If Jesus' service is self-giving for the ransom of men, the disciples' service also must be self-giving and redemptive. Here we have a heightening of the theme of discipleship and service. Until then it meant a sharing in Jesus' work for the Kingdom of God in the service of men through preaching, healing, liberating, and feeding the hungry; now it means self-gift as the redemptive service of men. The same idea is contained in Jesus' challenge to his disciples: "Can

you drink the cup I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mk 10:38).

Lk 22:24-27 also proposes Jesus' example of service for the imitation of the disciples. The pericope is closely parallel to Mk 10:41-45 in the description of the situation, namely, the ambition of the disciples, and in the thought and wording of Jesus' answer. Probably they are variants of the same tradition. While Mk 10:45 proposes Jesus' service in his whole life and especially his redeeming death as an example for imitation to the disciples, Lk 22:27 proposes Jesus' attitude of service at table, but it could perhaps be understood as an image of the whole life of Jesus, as Mk 10:45a does. The greatness of the disciples will consist not in worldly greatness derived from power and domination and recognition of the world but solely in humble service. This is the greatness Jesus has displayed during his entire ministry and is displaying at the supper serving his disciples, and will consummate through his death. Jesus' own example of service obliges his disciples to a similar service of men.

The washing of the feet of the disciples by Jesus (Jn 13:1ff.) is the best symbolic expression of his redemptive love and service. Out of love Jesus rendered this service, which only slaves were expected to do (cf. v. 1). He did it fully conscious of his central position in God's plan of salvation (v. 3). His humble action displayed to his disciples the degree of condescension and self-sacrifice his office entailed. It revealed to the disciples the meaning of their own life as a life of service: Jesus' words, "If I, then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (v. 14), show the profound basis of the obligation of mutual service in the Church.

The Gospels clearly teach that an Ecclesiology of service is the necessary consequence of a Christology of service. The denial of one implies the denial of the other also. Like the first disciples of Jesus the Church also must learn this lesson, however painful it may be.

III. The Church and Service

Obeying Christ's explicit command and imitating his supreme example the Church of Christ is bound to be a serving Church. The service of the Church should not be a purely external imitation, but embody the deep dimension of service which characterized Jesus' life and death. More than a mere collaboration with the Servant Christ, it should be a continuation, a representation, a making present again, of the service of Christ. The Christian service must contemporize Jesus' work for the Kingdom of God, with the various tasks of announcing the good news to the poor, healing the sick, liberating the oppressed, and feeding the hungry, culminating in his redemptive sacrifice. The Church's manner of service should be faithful to the manner of Christ's service. Just as the Son of God identified himself in his incarnation with those whom he was serving and took their misery and sinfulness upon himself and suffered in their stead, so the Church also must identify herself with those whom she has to serve even in their worst misery and hopelessness. She must not judge, dominate or condemn, but console, elevate and ennable. She must not be imperious and self-exalting in her ways, but always serving in humility and self-emptying, remembering the supreme self-emptying of her Lord. Her service must aim at restoring human dignity to the oppressed and the enslaved. In short, the Church must not only abhor the ways of worldly lords who lord it over, but faithfully follow the way of service to total self-gift, trodden by her Lord.

The service of the Church is a transmission and communication of what has been received from the Father through the Spirit. In I Cor 12 St Paul expresses the universal ministry of the Church through the image of the body. All the members of the body have to contribute to this ministry, each according to his gifts: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12: 4-7). Here 'gifts', 'service' and 'working' express different aspects of the same reality. The expression 'gifts' shows the gratuitous character of this reality; 'ministry' emphasizes that it is for others, and 'working' that it

originates in God's power. There is no opposition between charism and service. All gifts enumerated in vv. 8ff. are ordained to service. There is indeed a variety of service in the Church corresponding to the variety of charisms: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies" (1 Pet 4: 10f.). Thus the Church's ministry is not an arbitrary service, but a faithful and obedient service according as one has received from the Holy Spirit. As Hans Küng says: "The Church, being a fellowship of the gifts of the Spirit, is also a fellowship of different ministries. *Charisma* and *diakonia* are correlative concepts. *Diakonia* is rooted in *charisma*, since every *diakonia* in the Church presupposes the call of God. *Charisma* leads to *diakonia* since every *charisma* in the Church only finds fulfilment in service. Where there is real *charisma*, there will be responsible service for the edification and benefit of the community" (*The Church*, London, 1967, p. 393f.).

Thus all apostolic work in the Church is *diakonia*, service (cf. Acts 20: 24; Rom 11: 13; 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 6: 3). The various tasks of the Church are the unfolding of this one service of the Church. All these services are directed to the building up of the body of Christ and bringing it to fulness as Eph 4: 11-13 strikingly formulates: "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain... to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

The Church's basic service is the proclamation of the word, the announcement of the good news, which is characterized as a "service of the word" (cf. Lk 1: 2; Acts 6: 4). But this should not be a mere repetition of old formulas, but a contemporization of the Gospel for the modern man addressing him and challenging him in his concrete life-situation. It should be actually a "good news" to him, transforming every sphere of his life. The service of the word should reach its fulfilment in the service of the liturgy, and especially in the Eucharist, in which

the proclamation of the word becomes in a special way a salvation event, where Christ's redeeming and sacrificial service is actualized for men today.

Just as Jesus' service was not limited only to the preaching of the Gospel of God, but reached man in his varied situations, so the Church's service should extend to all needs of men; and the N. T. itself characterizes such tasks as service. Care of the poor is designated as 'service at table' (Acts 6: 2). Collections to relieve the poor in the Church are 'service of the saints' (2 Cor 8: 4) and 'service of the liturgy' (2 Cor 9: 12). The community of Jerusalem practised this form of service by organizing practical help for the needy members of the community (cf. Acts 2: 44-47; 4: 32-37; 6: 1-6); the practice of *agape* in the early communities also had the practical purpose of sharing food with the needy.

The meaning of this form of service is expressed by the parable of the last judgment in Mt 25: 31-46. Service done to the least of brothers is done really for Christ, even to Christ (cf. vv. 40, 45). In the incarnation the Son of God identified himself with the human race; the risen Lord is present in all the believers, and in a special way in the poor, the hungry and thirsty, the homeless, the exploited, the imprisoned and the forgotten. They are the sign, the sacrament of Christ's presence. The Church must find her true identity with Christ present in these people. For them the Church must represent, make present again, Christ's own service of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick etc.

The service of the Church is essentially a service for the Kingdom of God. Even the very earthly services of feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, fighting injustice etc. are part of this service for the Kingdom of God. Just as the inauguration of the Kingdom of God consisted in Jesus' humble earthly service (cf. Lk 11: 19 etc.), so the progress of the Kingdom of God towards the final fulfilment will be achieved through the humble service of the Church. The kingdom of God Jesus proclaimed is not a purely otherworldly reality to be realized only in the future, but something that has effectively entered into human history, transforming the whole human existence. It does not consist merely in

the salvation of the soul, but in the total liberation of the human person from all forms of slavery and affliction, spiritual, material and social. It is God's fatherly rule of mercy, forgiveness, justice and universal love. Where there is any form of slavery, injustice, hatred or oppression there God cannot be ruling, there the Kingdom of God cannot exist. The total human situation – individual, social, economic, political – is assumed into God's rule and Kingdom; where anti-God forces in any form dominate and oppress God's children, God's rule cannot be real. That is why Jesus conceived his mission as an integral liberation of the whole human person; that is why he went about healing the sick, feeding the hungry, freeing the possessed; that is why he fought the injustices of the Jewish aristocracy. The Church continuing Jesus' service must strive for the integral liberation of man. She must struggle against all obstacles to the development and growth of men and women as free and responsible persons, if her proclamation of the Gospel to the poor and the afflicted is to be really good news to them. The Church's service for the eternal salvation of men, therefore, cannot be divorced from effective action for the integral salvation and development of men. If the whole Christian community is a community of service, it follows that special offices in it are nothing but special responsibility for the fulfilment of this essential life-function of the Church. That is why the N. T. uses the term *diakonia*, ministry, service, to denote office in the Church, rather than terms implying authority, rule, dignity or power. Office in the Church is a "ministerial vocation in the service of the people of God". Ministry in the Church extends in space and time the apostolic ministry, which is nothing but the extension of Christ's own ministry. The special offices in the Church, therefore, can be understood in its true meaning only as functions of the service of the Church. They are "a service within a service." Therefore any conception or exercise of office in the Church which is opposed to this essential characteristic, whether as regards ends or means or manner of exercise, is unfaithful to the very nature of office in the Church,

IV. The Church in India and Service

The Church's mission and service receive a special emphasis in the Indian context, in as much as a tragic situation of injustice, exploitation and oppression is widespread in India. Millions live in untold misery, exploited by a privileged minority. The Indian Church has not been fully interested or involved in this situation; to that extent she has failed in her mission. The urgent task of the Indian Church is to rethink her mission of service and to examine her attitudes and approaches and to transform her structures and institutions in the light of her mission of integral liberation and development of man. The Church cannot be satisfied with the traditional concept of her service as a work for the salvation of souls, but must actively work for social change, both personal and structural, which will free persons from all forms of slavery and enable men and women to achieve integral development of their full personality.

India's development and integral liberation are possible only if the Indians learn the spirit of brotherhood, compassion, sharing and self-immolation. The Church's Gospel of the Fatherhood of God and the consequent brotherhood of men can inspire such a spirit, if it is re-interpreted and applied to the social, economic and political realities of our country.

It is true that the Church's resources of wealth and personnel are inadequate to achieve the total liberation of hundreds of millions of India. But the Church has the infinite resources of the Gospel, which is the power and wisdom of God. This should inspire her with confident optimism. The Church must put her trust in the promises of Christ and in his power to transform human hearts. She must rely on the multifarious gifts the Holy Spirit is continually giving her. The Indian Church must fight all forms of self-alienation, fear, pettiness and ghetto mentality; she must overcome all complexes of minority, inferiority, and persecution. Placing her confidence in her divine mission and the infinite riches of Christ and his Gospel the Indian Church must act as the little leaven that slowly transforms the vast Indian nation with the leaven of Christ's serving love. She must be the light on the mountain, which illuminates the dark corners of the Indian life with the light of Jesus' Gospel of love.

The Indian Church must have the assurance that she has something precious to share with the Indian people. Rejecting all temptation to self-defence and narrowness on the one side, and triumphalism and arrogance on the other, she must confidently and humbly fulfil her mission of service.

This is particularly true of the Church's attitude to the Indian cultures and religions. Just as Christ did not come to destroy but to fulfil the Law and the Prophets, so the Indian Church must humbly serve and fulfil the Indian cultures and religions. The Church must help them to discover their true identity in the light of the Good News of Jesus Christ, not in a spirit of competition, aggression or domination, but in a spirit of humble service, and liberate them from all that enslaves them, from all superstition and fatalism and automatism that fetter them.

The spirit of service should animate the relations between the individual Churches in India. Each must be encouraged and helped to preserve and promote its identity, individuality and uniqueness. The spiritual heritage, liturgy and the particular way of Christian life cherished by a local Church must be held in high esteem by the other Churches. No Church may try to dominate or absorb other Churches. No Church may claim exclusive privileges and rights for the evangelization of India, which is the unavoidable right and inescapable duty of every Church in India. This right may not be denied to any Church for preserving purely juridical structures or long-standing and unjust monopoly. On the contrary the Churches must whole-heartedly encourage and generously collaborate with each other in the great mission of the evangelization of India.

The Indian Church must rethink the meaning and function of her institutions, educational, professional and charitable. Are they really organs of service and genuine liberation, or are they organs of power and prestige of the Church? Often they express less the spirit of the Servant Christ, than the spirit of worldly lords. Many ecclesiastical institutions are serving not the poor and exploited masses who cannot pay for the services, but the rich and exploiting *élite*, and are thus helping to perpetuate structures of exploitation. This trend must change. The Church

must consecrate all her resources and energies for those who really need her service. Her institutions must be purged of all casteism, communalism and triumphalism, and become real centres of sharing and service in the spirit of brotherhood.

If all sections of the Indian Church must do their share in actualizing Christ's service in India, it is especially the duty and privilege of the leaders who hold special ministry and office in the Church. It is heartening to note that they are now less interested in being and acting like princes, and are willing to renounce princely prerogatives and titles. It is hoped that this renunciation has deep roots which will produce great fruits of genuine and humble service. In any case, the effort to become like the Servant Christ, who immolated himself that men may have abundant life, has to be made honestly and realistically on all levels of leadership and office in the Church.

The Indian Church must joyfully accept all the demands, costs and risks of her evangelical service. The way of service is the way of the cross, and the way of the cross leads to self-immolation and the paschal mystery. The inspiration for this self-immolating service is given by the Lord who came "not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many".

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The Unifying Church

Unity, which is the integrating and cohesive element of the human society, belongs to the very nature of the Church. The Church is ever-expansive and all-embracing. It is to lead humanity to union with God and fellowmen. The very existence of the Church is for achieving this unity on earth. Hence Jesus prayed "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17: 21).

The unity in the Church consists in communion of man with God and fellowmen. Any other form of unity without these two dimensions will be defective and inadequate. There is a constant temptation to reduce unity merely to the external sphere which will produce only a kind of uniformity that is artificial. Unity is internal and profound, whereas uniformity is external and superficial.

In this post-conciliar period of inter-religious dialogue, ecumenical openness and theological pluralism, the sphere of the ecclesial unity is indeed of great importance. The recent ecclesiological studies have opened up new horizons for ecclesial relations. The Constitution of the Church in the Modern World speaks of the role of the Church: "For every benefit which the People of God during its earthly pilgrimage can offer to the human family stems from the fact that the Church is 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' simultaneously manifesting and exercising the mystery of God's love for man" (Church in the Modern World, 45). The new openness emphasizes what "human beings have in common and promotes fellowship among them. For all peoples comprise a single community, and have a single origin, since God made the whole race of men dwell over the entire face of the earth" (Non-Christian Religions, 1). No barrier on the basis of religion, race, nationality, customs, ideology, language or culture can stand in the way of genuine human fellowship. The Church has to involve herself in the human life-situations of the people around. "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of this

age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ' (Church in the Modern World, 1).

But this openness does not make the Church anonymous in her identity. On the contrary it is through her genuine openness she reveals her identity and specific role in the world. Church is the community which confesses and professes the Divinity of Christ Jesus and commits themselves for realizing the Kingdom of God on earth. She stands for reconciliation of men among themselves and with God. She helps men to rise above the man-made barriers which hinder the genuine fellowship and communion. In other words, the Church is to help humanity to grow into the fullness of life (Jn 10: 10) for which the Son of God became man. Christ liberated man from all those barriers which impede or frustrate his integral development. This service is indeed for realizing the Kingdom of God.

The Church exists to announce the transforming presence of God in history. Human beings are brought to the communion of the Divine Spirit. They are made to realize that they belong to the common family of which God is the Father. The Church is an integrating force of genuine love among men who are divided on various levels. The real fellowship and genuine communion of Life are achieved through the Church. The Risen Lord acts in and through his Church to transform and unite men bringing them into his own communion of life. This unique role of the Church opens our eyes to her real nature.

One Church: two aspects

For the last few centuries there has been too much emphasis on the societal or organizational aspect of the Church. The whole canonical system of the Western Church was developed in order to protect this juridical structure. Over-emphasis of the organizational structure can create an image of the Church which can be compared to an empty shell devoid of its rich content! Ecclesiologists have repeatedly pointed out the grave dangers of such an over-emphasis at the cost of the spiritual aspect. The image and message of the Church are essentially spiritual. The whole organizational structure of the Church should be subordinated to the spiritual aspect. The words of Henri de Lubac are indeed rele-

tant: "If Christ is not her wealth, the Church is certainly destitute; if the Spirit of Christ does not flourish in her, she is certainly sterile. If Christ is not her architect, and his Spirit is not the mortar which binds together the living stone of which she is built, then her building is indeed fallen into ruin. If she does not reflect the unique beauty of the face of Christ, the Church is without beauty, and she is the tree whose root is the passion of Christ". *The Splendour of the Church*, transl. by Michael Mason, Glen Rock, N. J., 1963, pp. 130-131).

According to the juridical structure the Church is a perfect society. The clergy are in charge of this structure as its officers and custodians. It is highly centralised. The entire net work of coordination and subordination on various levels is looked after by the various ranks of the clergy who alone are authorized to enjoy jurisdiction in the Church. Just like the civil officers they have their own titles, privileges and prerogatives! The consequence of this system was quite conspicuous. There emerged a division between the rulers and the ruled, the clergy and the laity, the superiors and the inferiors. This image is indeed detrimental to the real concept of unity within the Church. The Church is essentially the community of the People of God, united in faith, hope and charity. The unity of the Church is indeed a communion of Christian fellowship which should never be reduced to a mere integration of the baptized in the organizational structure of the Church.

The real unity consists in charity. There is only one Lord, one Faith and one baptism. The Pastors are to maintain this unity in charity. "We possess nothing: there is only one dominus, the Lord, who establishes the various offices, distributing his gifts to each one individually according to his will" Hence there cannot be any domination, any possession, any spirit of possessiveness.... Hence the law of Christian life is that we should consider ourselves as stewards of God's gifts which are for the good of all: "as every man has received grace, ministering the same one to another: as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (Yves Congar, 'The Historical Development of Authority' in 'The Problems of Authority' edited by John M. Todd, London, 1964, p. 122). Cardinal Suenens calls the existing system "an essentialist, bureaucratic, static, juridical, centralizing tendency" (*National Catholic*

Reporter, Vol. 5, No. 5 May 28, 1969, p. 1). An organization can be governed by a set of laws and regulations. Those who abide by the observance of the legal prescriptions are good men for the organization.

The Church is not a mere organization. The pneumatic element is more important in the Church. Eastern Ecclesiology has developed with greater emphasis the role of the Holy Spirit. The Church is the community of the believers united in faith, hope and charity. It has two aspects, internal and external. These two aspects form one reality. The external aspect consists of the organizational structure. The internal aspect is the life of the Church in the Spirit. The visible external structure should be the sign or instrument of the life of the Church. The Constitution on the Church of Vatican II compares these two aspects of the Church with the two natures of Christ: "Just as the assumed nature inseparably united to the divine Word serves Him as a living instrument of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the communal structure of the Church serve Christ's Spirit, who vivifies it by way of building up the body" (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). The visible element of the Church gets its meaning and relevance in proportion to its dependence on the invisible reality of the life in the Spirit. The harmony of these two aspects constitutes the real unity within the Church. The first Chapter of the *Lumen Gentium* is on the Mystery of the Church. This beginning is indeed a turning point in Ecclesiology. The emphasis of the spiritual aspect is re-established. The Spirit is the cohesive and unifying force of the Church.

Unifying Spirit in the Church

The goal of Jesus' earthly existence was to unite men among themselves and with God. After the resurrection, as he had already promised, he sent the Holy Spirit who is the fundamental principle of unity in the Church. St Irenaeus speaks of the early Church's awareness of her close relation with the Spirit: "Where the Church is, there the Spirit of God is too, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all its grace" (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 24, 1; PG Vol. 7, col. 966). The soul vivifies and animates the body. At the same time it is the principle of unity of the different functions of the body. The Encycli-

cal 'Mystici Corporis' develops this aspect (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 1943, p. 210). E. Vauthier summarizes the position of Thomas Aquinas: "The Holy Spirit unifies the Church by being present *unus et idem numero* in all the members of the mystical body. Two elements contribute towards making the unity thus brought about extremely strong and profound. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit is the principle of numerical unity among the faithful. On the other, he is the immanent principle of unity, for he is the guest of their souls (*inhabita est*), he is possessed by them (*habent*), he fills them (*replet omnes sanctos*) and he thus fills all the Church (*replet et unit totam ecclesiam*) E. Vauthier, *Le Saint Esprit principe d'unite de l'Eglise d' apres S. Thomas d' Aquin*', in *Melanges de science religieuse*, 1949, vol. 6, pp. 57-80, cited by Jerome Hamer OP, 'The Church is a Communion', transl. by Ronald Mathews, New York, 1964, pp. 184-185).

The Spirit is the principle of unification in the activity of the Church and the principle of its continuity in time. The oneness of the Church does not consist in the ability of its organizers but in the life of the Spirit. The Apostles and the elders had a vivid awareness of the Spirit working in the Church. "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." (Acts 15: 28). The Spirit unifies, sanctifies and animates the Church. Just as Jesus was sent by the Father to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God the Holy Spirit was sent to dwell in the followers of Jesus (Jn 16:13; 14:26).

The Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples to transform them into the divine fellowship i. e. to make them sharers of the Trinitarian life. It is a life-giving or life-sharing process. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20: 21). The Spirit is given to continue this Trinitarian life-giving mission. The new birth in baptism is in the name of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and disciples while they were united in prayer. Jesus assured that he would be in their midst when they are united together in his name (Mt. 18:20). It is his glorified presence through his Spirit. It is a sanctifying presence. The Spirit initiates and integrates the disciples into the new life of the glorified Jesus.

Jesus wanted his disciples to be born of the Spirit (Jn 3:5) in order to enter the Kingdom of God. A new birth means a new form of life. For the disciples of Jesus it is the genuine life of faith in Christ, Birth in the Spirit is a perpetual process of renewal. The Holy Spirit is the dynamic principle and transforming force who sustains this endless process of renewal in the individuals and community. The Spirit makes the Revelation of Christ the dynamic force of the life of the Christians individually and collectively.

St Paul speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given for community. It is to strengthen the community in true fellowship. Consequently sectarianism is a sin against the unifying Spirit in the Church. Sin divides what the Spirit unites. The various offices in the Church are for achieving this communion in the Spirit. "If you are one of the lay faithful, you have been given the Spirit that you may believe; if you are a bishop, you have been given the Spirit that you may be a shepherd, to care for and direct the flock that the Holy Spirit has entrusted to you. One person has the grace of prayer, and uses it for the good of others; a second person has the grace of strength of giving testimony or of comforting; suddenly, through the working of the Holy Spirit, these are all brought together to do Christ's work in that communion of saints in which we declare our belief in the Credo" (Yves Congar, *Laity, Church and World*, transl. by Donald Attwater, London, 1960, p. 20).

The variety of the gifts is indeed the splendour of the Church. The principle of unity and diversity is excellently visible in the Church. Unity is in the Spirit and variety is in its expression. The intimate relation between the principle of unity and the diversity of the various functions constitutes the mystery of the Church. The harmony between these two makes the Church authentic. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (I Cor. 12:12).

Charismatic dimension in the Church

The sphere of the Spirit is much wider than the administrative apparatus of the Church. The Church is called the presence

of the Spirit of God: "You also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2: 20). The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church and in every Christian: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (I Cor. 3: 16). The gifts of the Spirit enriches the Church. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; now there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (I Cor. 12:4-7). Thus Christians are the living stones and Church is the spiritual dwelling of God. According to Paul Church is a dwelling organism living in the Spirit of God.

The authority in the Church is to distinguish and co-ordinate the various gifts for the common good of the Church. It will be a sin against the Holy Spirit to claim any monopoly of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. "Do not quench the spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every evil" (I Thess. 5:19-22). All the gifts of the Spirit are for the building up of the Church. Everything contributes to the integral growth of Christ's body which is the Church. "All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills (I Cor. 12:11). These gifts constitute the living fellowship and unity of the Church.

Unity in Life:

Jesus founded the Church for those who really desire to follow him. They formed the community of those who lived the Gospel. The emphasis was on the life of the disciples. Jesus publically condemned those in whom there was a separation between teaching and life. Life and doctrine form the two sides of the same reality. Where there is no harmony between life and the gospel there is indeed a division. This harmony should be evident also in the life of the ecclesial community. "The Church in its life will bear witness to the living Christ, the Risen Lord in whom the Gospel is realized by sharing this life in the Spirit with others" (M. Vellanickal, *Good News and Witness*, Bangalore, 1973, p. 161). Proclamation of the Word and life-witness form one reality. The Church is to unite the fellowmen by sharing its Christ-experience with others. What is

lived and experienced is shared with others. Thus the real witness becomes a life-sharing and unifying process. St John says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete" (I Jn. 1:1-4).

The Christian religion is not a collection of a few doctrinal definitions or formulations but essentially a witness of the Gospel. The true doctrine and true practice should go together. Orthodoxy and orthopraxis form an interlocked reality. Orthodoxy without orthopraxis makes the Church ridiculous. The doctrine is for life. It becomes a reality in orthopraxis. History of the Church is not short of instances where the 'defenders' of orthodoxy were not always doers of the truth! Jesus, who gave his life for others have seen his followers in the Church persecuting others in the name of purity of Christian doctrine! The inquisitorial courts will give many examples of 'handing over to the secular arm' heretics for execution! The Declaration on the Religious Freedom of Vatican II has made this guarded statement: "In the life of the people of God through the vicissitudes of human history, there have at times appeared ways of acting which were less in accord with the spirit of the gospel and even opposed to it" (Religious Freedom, 12).

United in Charity

God's presence is made manifest in the life of love. "As long as we love one another, God will live in us and his love will be complete in us. We can know that we are living in him and he is living in us because He lets us share his Spirit" (I Jn 4:12-13). The Spirit abides in the Christian community and urges us to be authentic to our mission. The unifying presence of Christ becomes a reality when believers are filled with charity." And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has.

commanded us. All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us" (I Jn 3: 23-24). The Spirit which Jesus gave is the Spirit of love and fellowship.

The unifying love prompts us to reunite those who are separated and to show the true way to those who are led astray. Reconciliation is the Church's motto and division is her enemy. The distinguishing mark of the Christians is unity and love. "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35). Love and unity are established when the Holy Spirit opens the human hearts to one another and keeps it sensitive to the needs of others. The Spirit dwells in each person to liberate him from the slavery of evil. The Church is to be a faithful agent of this liberating Spirit to elevate men to the true fellowship in charity.

Fr Vellanickal explains the Johannine concept of Christian fellowship: "By this spirit of divine love that transforms the lives of believers, the Church will be transformed into a real community of fellowship. To be a Christian is for John to have fellowship with God, with the Father and with the Son in the Spirit (I Jn 1: 3-6). And it results in the brotherly fellowship of the believers (I Jn 1: 3-7). Thus the Church in its life will bear witness to the living Christ, the Risen Lord in whom the Gospel is realized by sharing this life in the Spirit with others" (M. Vellanickal, *Good News and Witness*, Bangalore, 1963, p. 161) The Church becomes true to its name when she projects this image of fellowship in charity. When she fails to project this image she betrays her mission and vocation. This love and unity is not something vague or mystical but an experiential reality. It is an experience of elevating love above ourselves. "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn 14: 21). God reveals Himself to one who loves and lives in Him. The Spirit of Jesus transforms our human hearts and reveals him to us. Through this spiritual experience we grow above ourselves into the Risen Lord. Jesus lives in us and we in Him. "I will not leave you desolate; I will

come to you. ... and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn 14:18-20).

Churches living in communion

The Catholic Church is a communion of individual Churches. Diversity exists in the form of worship, devotion, prayers, vestments, art, architecture, life-style etc. Differences exist also in the field of theology, terminology, traditions, languages etc. This diversity indeed reveals the multi-dimensional richness of the Christian revelation. There is only one God, one faith and one baptism. This profound unity is manifested through the different expressions proper to each Church. This diversity should never breed dissensions.

Each Church should retain and foster its heritage because every Church has its own unique contribution to make towards sharing Christ-experience. Only those Churches which are aware of their identity and spiritual heritage will be able to give its share to the universal Church. The principle of diversity was evident on the day of Pentecost itself. It is an ever valid principle of the Church of Christ. People from different countries thanked God for the Good News which they heard in their own languages (Acts 2: 5-7). The Spirit of God is at work among all the nations to unite them in Christ. The different Churches which came into being in their own socio-cultural background reveal the universal realization of the Christ event. The Risen Lord is present among them through His Spirit. The different individual Churches which exist today have handed down to us the Christian experience which they have inherited from the original testimony of the apostles.

But it is a sad reality that during the course of centuries there were certain attempts in the Church to impose certain traditions and regulations on other Churches. But the wisdom of the ages has taught her a lesson and the documents of Vatican II are indeed a step forward in the right direction. There is a rediscovery of the concept of the Church which consists of the communion of individual Churches. The Council says:

"That Church, Holy and Catholic, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments, and the same government and who combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches of rites. Between these, there flourishes such an admirable brotherhood that this variety within the Church in no way harms her unity, but rather manifests it" (Oriental Churches, 2): "They are consequently of equal dignity, and none of them is superior to the other by reason of rite" (ibidem, 3). "Therefore attention should everywhere be given to the preservation and growth of each individual Church" (ibidem, 4). "This Sacred Synod, therefore, not only honours this ecclesiastical and spiritual heritage with merited esteem and rightful praise, but also unhesitatingly looks upon it as the heritage of Christ's universal Church. For this reason, it solemnly, declares that the Churches of the East, as much as those of the West, fully enjoy the right, and are in duty bound, to rule themselves" (ibidem, 5). Cfr. also the Constitution on the Church, Nos. 13, & 23).

These Conciliar statements are of great ecclesiological importance. This approach provides the general principles for promoting the real unity in the Church with its legitimate diversity.

Conclusion

Unity is an essential image of the Church. The Church has aspects, visible and invisible. These two aspects are compared to the human and divine natures of Christ. The visible aspect is the sign or instrument of the invisible aspect. The unifying principle of these two aspects of the Church is the holy Spirit. Hence Jesus wanted his disciples to be born again in this Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the source of unity and diversity in the Church. The principle of unity should be clear in the lives of the disciples of Christ. There should be real harmony between faith and life. The perfect harmony lies in the life of charity. Charity transforms the lives of the believers and elevates them. This fellowship in charity should reflect in the universal Church which consists of the communion of the various individual

Churches. The principle of unity in the Church is sustained by the Holy Spirit who reveals the life of the Church in rich diversity. The diversity in the Church never hinders unity but rather manifests it. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working; but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

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The Image of the Church through Centuries -

An Essay in interpretation

Volumes could be written on such a nearly limitless topic. Yet it could be bold to pretend that many studies have already been published on this theme. One of the best attempts we know of is the work of Fr Y. Congar o. p., on the Christian Symbolism of the Temple and its roots. It has been of much inspiration to us.

Three important preliminary remarks should now be made. In the first place the image of the Church can be seen from two main angles: either the Church as understood and accepted by her own members, or the Church as looked at by outsiders. Secondly, the phrase "Image of the Church" belongs indeed to a symbolical, if not poetical, attitude of mind and heart. And why not? For hundreds of years man, and the Christian is no exception to it, has reacted to his social and religious environment in a symbolical manner often verging on the poetic. Rash would be the judgment of those who think that such an attitude is outmoded in a scientific age; man's way of representation may change, but its content remains very much the same. Finally, one cannot speak of the Church without including and emphasizing the ecumenical dimension. It will be our humble endeavour to be faithful to a basic ecumenical vision.

The usual divisions in Church History cannot be maintained here. There are two chief reasons for leaving them out to a great extent. The sense of the Church among Christians and the attitude of the outsider towards her cut across too sharp a division into periods; the modern ecumenical approach makes it compulsory to bypass too strict a system of compartmenting.

Taking their cue from the New Testament, especially from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, and his first epistle to the Corin-

thians, and also from the Johannine vision of Christian love, the early Christians for many years regarded their Church first and foremost as *agape*, the community of mutual love, support and understanding. Truly enough, this conviction and the sentiments it caused had always its ups and downs. The earliest communities experienced it all the stronger since they were rather small, more homogeneous, less threatened by the divisions naturally arising from differences in social and economic status. To take one example, it can be assumed that the Christian Church of Antioch was better knit together at the time of St Ignatius than of St John Chrysostom, about 260 years later. Yet, on the whole, the same rhythm of Christian living, though more and more elaborate and diversified in the course of years, pervaded the communities.

Yet, the image of the Church got slowly but surely expressed in a more symbolic, yet always realistic, way. One of her more vivid projections was that of the mother, the treasure of incommensurable gifts, the source of life and love, the privileged milieu in which the Christian, both personally and socially, encounters Christ in the Holy Spirit. Among the Syrian Churches there developed also a strong emphasis not only on the Church as heir to the former people of God, but also and more significantly, as the bride of the Lord, born out of His side opened on Golgotha, through blood and water, signs of baptism and Eucharist. Thus could the Eucharist be regarded as coextensive with the Church.

Since the celebration of the Eucharist was the focusing centre of their life in love, the Christians saw the Church more perhaps in her local incarnation, later on in its regional unity, though its universality was not and could not be overlooked. In a sense the "Churches" were for them the first manifestation of love.

It has become almost a slogan to decry the so-called Constantine era as the origin of all sorts of unworthy attitudes and practices among Christians. Truly enough, the Church as it existed in the Roman Empire refashioned by Diocletian enjoyed since Constantine a freedom which she knew before only sporadically: the Church got better organized and at the same time

more liable to political interferences. However, the next centuries in her history, especially in the East, should be better called Theodosian than Constantinian. For since the end of the 4th century there was laid down the foundation for an ideology of Church and State relations, later called a "symphony". Though it affected more the Greek East than the Latin West the latter did not entirely escape from it.

Did that ideal affect so deeply the image of the Early Church as to transform it beyond recognition? I doubt it, at least, at the level of local communities. For, thanks to the great developments of the liturgical life of the 4th and 5th centuries, the sense of belonging was not only kept up among Christians but increased and strengthened. Even the formation of separate Churches in the wake of the Christological quarrels goes a long way to show that the awareness of the local communities as repositories of Christian allegiance was so overwhelming as to defeat the belonging to the universal Church. Whereas the image of the Church as mother was kept alive, it became more varied as it were, with such emphasis on orthodoxy, discipline and initiation. It is likely that in the West, during the enormous changes brought about by the migrations of the Germanic peoples, the image projected by the Church differs widely; on the one hand, the personality of leading bishops often helped her to appear under the role of protector, foster-mother and preserver, on the other hand, the central figure of the bishop of Rome made the Church in the West more closely related to St Peter and his apostolic successors.

Until that time, those who had lived and worshipped outside Christianity had assumed towards it successive attitudes which can be summarized as follows: As long as the Church remained a rather small, though fast expanding Creed, they admired and feared it. They admired the love that bound her members inspite of false rumours and calumnies; on the other hand they got afraid of the challenge the Church offered, particularly towards the social and cultural traditions of those days. Yet, many of those who remained non-Christian were not necessarily adverse to their Christian fellow citizens, even when the latter were submitted to so violent persecutions.

During the fourth and fifth centuries the non-Christian attitude towards the Church became more diverse and also more complicated. Therefore it is not easy to find out which image the Church could have projected to the non-Christians. At least this much can be surmised: many accepted philosophically that Christianity had become a major spiritual force; others lamented over such a victory and refused to have anything to do with it; others again accepted it as *fait accompli*, and finally conformed to what was unavoidable.

With the growth of larger ecclesial units, finally leading to the patriarchates, it looks as if those regional churches projected a clearer image of the Church as a well-integrated community; the fatherly aspect vied with the motherly one to make the regional Church closer to her own members.

In the West, and to some extent also in the East, the Church had become a source of much benefit, including cultural and material one. Truly enough the image of the Church tended, already by the fifth and sixth centuries, to integrate much clerical leadership, though it was still very mild if compared to later centuries. However this tendency was perhaps less pronounced in the East than in the West. In the East again the image projected by the Byzantine Church was more of a mystical reality acting in symphony with the cultural, political and social life. It tried to keep a balance between the Church and the Churches, thanks to the rich liturgical traditions it had developed.

Until the beginning of the second millennium the only acknowledged apostolic Church in the West was Rome; it had grown considerably in social stature and spiritual influence. Those were centuries when all over the new kingdom there developed a remarkable devotion to St Peter and his successors; it became particularly active in Germanic countries, e.g. in Anglo-Saxon England. We seem to forget sometimes that the last and lasting evangelization of western, central and even eastern Europe was mostly the works of monks, first celtic, then Anglo-Saxon and finally local. The sense of the Church as a community well expressed especially in the rule of St Benedict, spread through the monasteries which did much for the spiritual, cultural, educational

and socio-economic welfare of the new nations. Thus had been kept alive the dream of Rome and of the Roman Empire, and so to speak, it became re-incarnated through a succession of political and cultural renaissances.

Yet the West remained always more divided politically and more united ecclesiastically. The sense of the Church Universal was more identified with allegiance to the Roman See which appeared as the chief pattern of all Christian living.

On the contrary, in the Byzantine East, the ideal of a "symphony" between the Church and the State was not only kept alive in Byzantium itself but in all those countries evangelized by Byzantine missionaries. Though the monastic and clerical elements enjoyed a very deep influence, the laity in that Church was often better integrated than in the West. This does not mean that the Church in the Byzantine Empire did not tarnish its earlier image. On several occasions it seemed to appear as a department of the State. Yet, its ubiquitous monastic world kept up a deep sense of Christian freedom. This explains why from the 11th-12th centuries onwards the Orthodox Churches became more relevant to their own people than the State itself.

From the view-point of the Church's universality there is little doubt that both East and West, busy as they were with solving their own problems, were becoming increasingly self-sufficient, endangering thereby the awareness that the Church is both local and universal.

In spite of many drawbacks and divisions the spiritual significance of the Church in the East did not meet with any major crisis. In the West, unfortunately the image of the Church became so much affected by the constant decline of morality that in many cases both the clerical and lay elements in the Church almost lost entirely the basic evangelical ideals which were replaced by money and pleasure. The Church came too often to be treated in terms of economic and socio-political influence; even the papacy did not escape from the crisis, some of its representatives being worse than the laity.

The depth of the crisis differed from region to region; still there is little doubt that sound elements had remained not only numerous but active. As in Byzantium they were often found in monastic circles. Beginning with them and soon fanning out all over the West, the reformers finally reached Rome, which had never lost its central position, despite the unworthiness of some of its occupants. From the middle of the 12th century onwards the papacy itself took the lead and launched a fast movement of reform which has actually never ceased acting on Christianity in the West ever since. Not only a fair measure of success was reached within a century or so, but this reformatory movement also influenced the cultural development so as to lead to a general renaissance.

Unfortunately, the tendency of the Greek East towards self-sufficiency and its untarnished image, on the one hand, and the preoccupation of the western half of the Church, including papacy, with its own problems, on the other, led to mutual estrangement. East and West in the Church which, with the exception of the anti-Ephesian and anti-Chalcedonian Churches, had succeeded in keeping united for a millennium, drifted away so steadily and so completely that by the thirteenth century they found themselves divided for good. Once more the image of the Church, one and holy, was damaged in her failure to give a more permanent solution to the ever living problem of unity in diversity. The latter overrode the former.

The advent of democratic forces was partially inspired by Christian ideals. Yet its best-known and lasting expression, the communes, showed early signs of anti-clericalism. This was equally true of the nationalism of the princes who, like the Roman canons, rediscovered the usefulness of the old Roman law, but made use of it in a quite different way. This emotional reaction of anti-clericalism was soon to be followed by practical restriction on the exclusive influence of the clergy in various fields. This was a sign of the times and also a judgement pronounced on the image projected by the Reformed Church. Though clerical pre-ponderance was due to the very movement of reform, it soon so much identified the Church with the clergy, that one of its least positive results was clericalism. Hence the inner harmony of the Church was considerably damaged in the West for centuries;

ever since anticlericalism was a powerful factor in the life of Western Christianity, it became a kind of refuge, even for well-intentioned lay Christians who wanted to make the Church more relevant to all its members. Such an emotional reaction rarely took place among Eastern Christians, among whom the balance between clergy and laity was better assured.

During the renewed reformatory efforts of the 13th and 14th centuries the image of the Church became the target of much criticism. In the eyes of even its best representatives, the official Church looked as too far away from the ideals she was expected to practise. They felt that the Church had not responded to their plea for a greater sense of simplicity, brotherliness and equality. Once more anti-clerical feelings came to the fore, but this time as a religious dimension proper. Even, John Huss who could be regarded as a genuine reformer, though somewhat imprudent for his place and time, did not succeed in helping out the Church in Bohemia, his own country, to recover her wholesome character as a community. The fact that his condemnation was effected not by a papal tribunal, but by the Council of Constance, is highly paradoxical!

For this universal council which aimed at finalising the long-awaited, always delayed, reform of the Church, should have been expected to uphold John Huss as one of the reformers of his times and as restoring that communitarian aspect of the Church which was so much needed then and there. Despite many a defect, the conciliar theory contained a positive ideal, that of the Church as an articulate community. It was however a child of the supremacy of canon law over ecclesiology. In order to succeed, the Council of Constance badly needed a theology of the Church, more particularly that of the local Churches and of the role of laity.

Truly enough, Constance received some delegates from the Greek Church, with the hope of paving the way to a lasting unity between the two Churches. But in vain, for the simple reason that the council was too Western to get the Eastern delegates really involved in its proceedings.

The dream of a Christendom under the papal monarchy was shattered, though during the rest of the 15th c. the papacy succeeded somehow in restoring its image as the chief, even unquestioned, authority over the Western Church. Nationalism and the incipient state-Churches fostered, rather than frowned at, by Constance and the conciliarists, had already become permanent forces in the Church's body politic. Again it was too much inspired by legal concepts than by any sensible ecclesiology.

During the century that preceded the Protestant outburst, the image projected by the Church in the West had strong lights as well as shades: saintliness and devotional life were not lacking, nor were wordliness and immorality; renewal at local and regional levels took place, but never enough nor always in a lasting manner; many pastors visited their flock, but many more did not. The Church in many places became a means of obtaining favours, rather than a living christian community.

In the East, Christianity was either passing through monastic revivals, especially in Russia, or trying to adjust itself to the growing Turkish presence and interference; the role of the laity was enhanced thereby, since they could play a bigger role than the clergy as the protectors of the Church; yet, apostasies were not uncommon, even among powerful laymen. The Eastern Churches continued to appear to its members as protecting mothers, and the liturgy remained the chief means through which their strong sense of community could be kept alive. Weak, they often were, with the possible danger of greed and bribery, of tampering in patriarchal and episcopal elections, and of the ubiquitous Islamic pressure. Only the Maronites and Malabarians could legitimately boast of having rarely suffered from their socio-political surroundings.

The Protestant attempt at reforming the Church was made to restore what was thought to be her right image, i.e. the evangelical pattern. Such a purpose had been served by many a Catholic reformer of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries. It was summed up in the movement called "Christian Humanism", which still had outstanding representatives in Italy, Spain, France, the Low Countries, Germany and England. It was the outcome of christian renaissance, calling for a "return to

the sources", including above all the Bible, and therefore very much in the line of the whole medieval reform of the Church, though with much greater emphasis on the evangelical ideals to be shared by all members, and therefore on the central importance of the laity. It is to be noticed that the Greek Orthodox scholars, who had taken refuge in Italy and later on, in much smaller numbers elsewhere in Western Europe, contributed much to such a "return".

Hence one has to correct another 'image' often projected still now of the relationship between Protestant and Catholic Reformations. Both arose from the same concern, both undistinguishable for a while; even Luther, who was less a humanist than a late medieval theologian, did not want to revolutionize the Church but to change it for the better. More radical and also much more conscious humanists were the other leaders of the Protestant movement as Calvin, Zwingly, Bucer and the English divines. The Catholic reformation, which was often called counter-Reformation because it assumed a much greater momentum under the impact of Protestantism, kept, often successfully, a balance between the best results of Christian humanism and the acquisitions of the middle ages. The old and new religious orders vied with each other to appropriate the lasting fruits of Christian humanism, e.g. in education, spirituality and scholarship.

The image of the Church which became the characteristic of the protestant type of Christianity was on the whole that of a community, which was strongly built up by the Gospel and even the Old Testament, consisting of rather small communities which knew of little or no clericalism. With the help of vernacular liturgies and the central place given to God's word, they soon tended to give the pride of place to the pulpit, over-shadowing the altar. In the more traditional Churches, like those of the Lutherans and Anglicans, many so-called "catholic" elements were kept, though too often in mere externals, whereas the "evangelical" element became the mainstay of Calvinism-Presbyterianism and its various offshoots. Moreover the interference of the State, as standing for a kind of lay supremacy, did not always prevent some of the more traditional Churches from re-assuming a kind of official image of a Church to be "conformed" to.

In the Tridentine and post-Tridentine periods the Catholic Church in the West definitely passed through a period of renewal, which endured at least until the end of the 17th century. Various currents were noticeable, such as the humanistic, the mystic, the scholastic, the patristic, even the pietistic, above all, the missionary. The last applies not only to the considerable expansion of the Church in Central and South America, and in Africa and in Asia, but also to the remarkable, and often successful, apostolate in the West especially during the 17th century and after. The "missioner" became the agent of renewal both in catechetics and in devotional fervour all over the West, including Poland, Hungary and other eastern European regions. Contrary to the Protestant achievements, however, the liturgical life got more fossilized than ever, except for a more wide-spread frequentation of the sacraments. Its renewed splendour and undeniable beauty in the setting of Baroque churches remained rather a spectacle to be witnessed than a living worship to be shared by the congregation.

The image of the Catholic Church then was fairly that of a great religious and social reality, still embracing, in its rhythmic sequence of seasons and festivals, the daily life of the common people; the parish priest, who had become a much better and more zealous pastor than in previous centuries, helped the people to keep their basic duties, the importance of which was more or less regularly emphasized by religious preachers; monastic life still maintained its age-long hold, even in cities, with new quests for a return to the origins, like the reformed Cistercians and Trappists; other religious orders such as the Augustinians, Capuchins and Jesuits multiplied on a scale often unknown before. Whereas many of the educated laity were still fairly attached to the Church, there were signs that the early pagan trends of the Renaissance had left furrows which could not be closed up. To the growing number of either mere theists or downright irreligious minds, the Church appeared as outmoded, irrational and dictatorial. The reign of the "philosophies", crowned in the 18th century by the enlightenment, was creating an intelligentsia which for all practical purposes was hardly Christian at all. For the first time since the conversion of Europe, Christianity knew of lapsed members, in whose eyes the Church had become an oddity,

if not a stumbling block on the way of authentic human fulfilment.

A new and quite active movement for the more complete reform of the Church reached great and international proportions under the name of Jansenism; it even fostered certain forms of local Churches. It wanted also the Church to become more austere and more detached, and to make her lay members more spiritually active and responsible. If Jansenism ultimately failed, it was due to its unfortunate pessimistic approach to Christian life combined with a lack of solid, enlightened theology. Yet it was a warning, often not sufficiently heeded, that no reform of the Church could ever stop lest it should fall back.

On the eve of the French Revolution the Church seemed to have settled down once more to an apparently well integrated socio-religious situation. Relations with the Eastern churches became more frequent, especially in the Middle East, leading to several new Eastern Catholic Churches; such 'Romanizing' approach succeeded notably, for instance, in Iraq, where slowly the majority of the so-called Nestorians were getting drawn into the orbit of the Catholic patriarchate, soon to be established firmly. However in India the contrary happened: a substantial minority of the St Thomas Christians who had earlier revolted against the Portuguese missionaries, gradually passed over to the Syrian Orthodox patriarchate of Antioch.

In the West, extending to both the Americas, the Churches, in spite of appearances of self-complacency, were besieged by such problems as irreligion among the intelligentsia, weakening of theological awareness, and lack of real Christian fervour. Many of the Churches, even the Orthodox in Russia, projected on the whole the image of a tutelary authority; only smaller groups, like the pietistic in Germanic countries and in England (and in the newly independent U.S.A.), or like those gathered in "congregations" and other such associations of religious orders in the Catholic Church, showed much fervour, and attempted, with a measure of success, to solve the traditional tension between clerics and laity. However, the brutal suppression of the Jesuits proved that this tension was not solved at the level of State and Church relations. Missionary zeal was still thriving, but with

some slackness here and there, especially in Latin America with notable exceptions. The image the Church had in the so-called "younger churches" of the 18th century was diverse to the extreme: in well-established colonies like Latin America and the Philippines, it was both very official and very popular, often looking like a young bride in heavily starched garments decked with jewels. In Africa and in Asia, on the whole, it was rather a poor church at least in externals, even to those who witnessed to Christ at the court of China and of the Great Mogul. In many ways it was a Church much closer to its people. In their eyes she should have appeared as the embodiment of motherly benevolence, if not of social uplift, though in many cases as in India, social distinctions were indeed maintained.

Among the Eastern Churches, more religious freedom was noticeable in the Turkish Empire, already suffering from an irremediable decadence; the Greek Church had come under the spell of a religious revival spearheaded by outstanding monastic personalities, yet the image she projected among his own people had remained traditional, as the community that gathered all the children of God in worship, but also as the living symbol of cultural and even political aspirations. Even the Maronite Church was playing the same role in Lebanon, and presided over the formation of the first Lebanese state, thus making it more than ever the place of refuge for all sorts of freedom-loving people in that region of the Mediterranean.

It is not the least contradiction of a period abounding in contradictions that the quest for freedom in all other fields often did not cover the religious one. It is also a period that witnessed the early developments of secularism, increased expressions of anticlericalism, and great revival in many different fields, the fruits of which were gathered slowly but steadily in the course of a century and a half.

The indescribable persecutions which the Church, laity as well as clergy, repeatedly underwent, in many countries including Latin America, helped her often, though unfortunately not always, to get rid of useless traditions and move ahead towards new horizons. In more than one sense the 19th century Church was torn between traditionalism and progress. One of the most

active human forces working on the religious background of traditional and even renovated Catholicism was anti-clericalism, above all in the so-called Latin countries.

Practically every where, but according to the law of progress and delay, the industrial revolution, with socialism and Marxism in its wake, came up with hosts of socio-religious problems for a Church which had just barely recovered from politico-religious upheavals. In some countries like Germany and N. America and Australia the Church changed its course in time and stayed with the fast emerging working class; elsewhere it often came too late, and lost the race. I say "the Church", for in this respect both Catholics and Protestants were involved.

Yet, we cannot overlook the birth and early developments of various movements within the church, especially during the last forty years of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. A growing return to the sources, stronger perhaps among Catholics than among Protestants, especially from the part of the laity ushered in an apostolic, theological, liturgical, biblical, educational and social awareness.

To the 19th century man the Church assumed various "looks": upholder of traditional religious values, educator of the intelligentsia and the masses, defender of moral rights and duties, promoter of social justice; but she could appear also as an ally of oppressive forces, and even as opponent of human liberty and the like. In the Catholic Church rapid growth of new feminine religious congregations helped to keep up the image of the Church as mother and handmaid, still looking after the educational and bodily needs of thousands of girls, boys, down-trodden, orphans, the aged, and the poor.

The missionary movement of the 19th century and after was sweeping in many ways, sometimes stronger among Protestants than among Catholics. Indeed it was still too often allied to colonialism, though missionaries sometimes dissociated themselves from the colonial expansionists. Perhaps the 19th century missionaries showed less respect for the new cultures they encountered than those in the previous ages, yet it is undeniable that in some instances local cultures and languages, e.g. in India,

benefited considerably by the work done by the so-called foreign-missionaries. To those non-Christians who joined the Church, she appeared as a force for religious uplift and fulfilment, more likely in Africa and in the Pacific than in Asia. Those who kept their traditional religion, often intimately related to age-long culture, the new Christian 'invasion' looked either as a puzzling phenomenon or as a threat.

Among the Eastern Churches some were developing fairly harmoniously, still projecting the image of a worshipping Church, though without enough sense of social changes. In the deteriorating Turkish Empire, the various Eastern Churches felt more free, nationalism was at work among them, especially among the Armenians; popular religion still held the people together not without conservatism and lack of intellectual leadership, contrasting in this respect with Russia. The monastic republic of Mount-Athos, thanks above all to a number of recruits from Russia and the Balkans, still held the pride of place as the great spiritual power-house of the Byzantine Orthodoxy. Among Eastern Catholics there were considerable developments in the 19th century.

At the same time several revivals affected the Protestant Churches deeply, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. The Anglican Church was no exception to it, due especially to an acute awareness of the need for a Social Gospel, and to an extraordinary resurrection of religious communities. They also launched one of the most impressive missionary movements in the history of Christianity. It is difficult to gauge what image Protestant and Anglican Churches projected then. In the eyes of many intellectuals, who had become liberal Christians, the Church was at best a useful gathering of individual Christians, a mere organization which could be an actual obstacle to the Gospel. For the devout it was still the community where the word of God was rightly preached and the sacraments rarely, still dutifully, performed. Yet many weak aspects blurred the Church's image: often it was too much identified with a capitalist-minded middle-class, who were too often unaware of the problems affecting their poor brethren.

During the last fifty years or so, the world in which and for which the Church lives underwent many capital changes,

including religious ones. For instance, the phenomenon of dechristianisation has made deep furrows almost everywhere among western Christians, if not among the Easterns (though much less), while the ecumenical movement has assumed a universal character, involving today all the divided Christendom.

Many would speak about the recent decades as characterized by a new revolution, a radical transformation; this is hasty and, in the final analysis, untrue. The apparent newness of the "new revolution" is actually a new coating of the fruit of whatever happened during the last hundred years. Moreover, in spite of the enormous progress in the various scientific fields, mentality and behaviour of Christians, as of mankind in general, do not change as fast as we think.

Be that as it may, one of the best acquisitions of the period is a more vivid awareness of and a deeper devotion to the Church as a community, as the worshipping and biblical people of God. The unavoidable defects of the Church as an institutionalized body are not overlooked, rather more and more known and even liable to correction. The sense of personal responsibility of each Christian, the need for a constant and living synthesis between the tradition and progress and a more concrete relationship between Church, Word of God and Sacraments, above all the Eucharist, go a long way to project a renewed image of the Church. The passages found in several decrees of the Council of Vatican II present the various phases of the Church's image. Actually this Council has a unique position in Christian history on account of its acute awareness of the Church.

It cannot be said however that Christians everywhere have such a personal and conscious sense of the Church. Clericalism as an age-old reality still exists, as well as its counterpart known as anti-clericalism. In many places and in many minds a lasting solution to the balance to be kept between the serving ministry and the serving laity has not yet been found.

For the last half a century or so the Church has become more aware of her duty towards the fostering of social and moral changes, i.e. towards implementing her saving mission in a more wholesome way. Much is written and spoken today about secular

forces. In spite of external appearances, the quest for spiritual renewal and fulfilment has never been so strongly felt as today: Hence the Church cannot be satisfied any more by projecting only the image of a revolutionary force; she must, more than ever, witness to her character as a mystical, worshipping and missionary community, which seeks first and foremost the kingdom of God.

The shocks and countershocks of the 20th century could not but affect also the Churches of the East. Yet the great destruction expected by many, especially in the marxist-leninist world, did not occur. Indeed it can be said that the Eastern Churches have still much to teach the West about their strong sense of spiritual values embodied in their liturgical communities. It must also be said that such Churches did not always succeed in projecting the image that was expected from them; for they were often subject to national rivalries, by a certain lack of a concrete awareness of the unavoidable, often beneficial, social changes. Most of them still need the spiritual and authentic renewal of the Eastern Christian vision that could certainly make their communities more dynamic, more faithful also to their original ethos, to their cosmic mission.

Which image was projected in recent decades by the Anglican and Protestant traditions? Among their most fervent groups the Church continues to be looked upon as a community of prayer, fellowship and zeal; in quite a few cases the emotional integration between life and prayer is impressive, even very attractive. This explains well the success of the revivalist trend, even in such countries as those of Latin America, supposed to be Catholic on the whole. About the Anglicans, their widespread communion has still often projected the image of an official, if not traditional Church, with a touch of the Victorian times. Yet, especially in the regions of Africa and Asia, where Anglicanism had spread, the Church quickly became more humane and more diverse. As elsewhere in the Christian world the crisis of dechristianisation has not left unaffected the Churches of the Reformation, more even than the Catholic Church, if one is to believe religious statistics. Bible Christianity still exists, but among the larger Protestant communions, a better balance between

the pulpit and the altar has often been successfully restored, but not without much tension.

All forms of divided Christianity are confronted with a world which lives more and more on science, technology and ever widening knowledge. For years it was thought in many circles that Science and Religion could not be reconciled. It was an illusion, but the illusion endured. Such an illusion, often transformed into a conviction, has led until our own day to a widespread disaffection for religion, if not to downright agnosticism. It may be regreted that Christian thinkers either came too late to dispel that illusion, or were not listened to, either by Christians themselves, or by those who had given up the religion of their forefathers.

Another factor is the social ideologies and their impact on the masses. This is not to say that Socialism was not always taken seriously, but too often this was exceptional and of little duration. One had to wait for the aftermath of World War I to see the Christians coming forward in large numbers to take up the challenge of social ideologies and to be bold enough to respond to it.

In those regions of Asia and Africa where the Church remains a minority, in spite of much effort, the Church has continued to project the image of an all-embracing mother, a bit more clericalised than in older Christian countries, but often with an enlightened laity, ready for greater share in the Christian task of transforming the world.

Today the face of the Church has assumed many different traits. There is great cultural diversity that it would be beyond any one's capacity to attempt recording it fully and accurately.

Yet, despite crisis and hurdles, many signs indicate that the Church is not only quite alive but ready to move ahead. One of those signs is certainly the ecumenical movement: never in the past had Christians become, even at the grass-roots, so wonderfully conscious as today of the need of fulfilling Christ's wish and prayer "that all be one." The ecumenical dimension is

not so much a question of meetings, assemblies, pooling resources, or even helping anti-colonial movements; it consists above all in realising the already existing spiritual unity prevailing among Christians, and in slowly and steadily, transforming it into a passionate and realistic quest for actual unity. The ecumenical Church of tomorrow will blend into a total harmony all the previous positive contributions of the separate bodies. This is the great hope of today which inspires millions, and which will be increasingly fulfilled in the years to come. Thereby the Church will project to both its members and non-members a more authentic, richer and wholesome image.

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E. R. Hambye

The Praying Church

The church is a community gathered around God. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in their midst." (Mt. 18: 20) Christ came to make men alive to the presence of God in their midst and respond to his call as true humans who are essentially social. His purpose was "to bring everything together under Christ as head, everything in the heavens and on earth" (Eph. 1:10). The mystery of Christ is "that the pagans now share the same inheritance, that they are parts of the same body, the same promise has been made to them in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph. 3: 6). "Now in Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far apart from us have been brought very close by the blood of Christ. For he is peace between us, and has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, actually destroying in his own person the hostility caused by the rules and decrees of the Law." (Eph. 2: 13, 14) Thus the church is meant to be a vital unity of the whole mankind and through it of the whole universe. This unity in principle has been achieved by the person and work of Christ and is continued to be accomplished by the ever present and all embracing activity of the risen Christ. The risen Christ at present acts through his Spirit through whom the mankind is formed into one body (cfr. 1 Cor. 12: 13). The working of the Spirit demands a response from the human spirits. The working of the Spirit of love can be reduced to love and the response to the same is principally love. This response of love is expressed and lived through prayer. Prayer like love, is essentially union with God and consequently union with men. So the mystery of Christ realised through the mystery of the Church, is evolved through a praying community. A community that willingly gathers itself around God in response to the call of His Spirit is in the inner core of the church.

Communities of the apostolic times

The church was formed in response to the word of God. Mary is both the type and mother of the church and she conceived and brought forth the source and founder of the church

through a process of proper response to God's self-communication; the Word made flesh continued the self manifestation and self communication of God through his own person and the church, which as the apostles understood, is the body and extension of Christ. "God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself... and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5: 19) Beginning from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Galilee and even up to the end of the earth (cfr. Acts 1: 8), the church was established when communities were gathered around God as a result of their response to the call of God, to the word of God. This word was communicated to them by the apostles and preachers while the Spirit was interiorly working both in those who communicated the word and accepted it (Acts 2: 4. 7: 10, 16: 14). For the first generation of christians to belong to the church was not to enrol themselves in an institutionalised and established church but to be immersed into Christ through faith and baptism and become one body and one spirit with him (1 Cor. 12: 13; 6: 17). Those who allowed themselves to be quickened by the Spirit and chose to belong to Christ and walk through the way (Acts 9: 2), inspired by the same Spirit began to polarise themselves into a body which they realised as vital unity. They entered this living community through faith and baptism and they could cease to belong to it if they chose the path of unbelief and selfishness. In the situation of the early church one could not choose to belong to a prestigious institution enjoying the temporal benefits from such an allegiance while one was neither open to the self-communication of God nor prepared to respond to it.

The early church was not made manifest by its numerous and beautiful churches, its affluent institutions, its decorated and richly clad prelates, the 'religious' habits of its members, and such other items as have assumed undue importance in later centuries and continues to do so even today. The early communities were characterised by their inner unity and real love (Acts 4: 32). It was a closely knit fraternal set up with real concern for one another which was greatly encouraged and fostered by the apostles (Acts. 4: 34, 35; 1 Cor 12: 12-30). They lived together and came together to pray and to share. Theirs was a glory of good works (Mt. 5. 16) and not of gold and silver (Act. 3: 6).

During the frequent periods of crisis when it was felt that this insignificant community of believers would be washed away, their only recourse was prayer (Acts. 4: 23-31). The Israel of old was continuously reminded that they should not rely upon their military prowess or that of their powerful neighbours and whenever they placed their hope in such things they have been miserably vanquished. Though the church in later centuries committed the same mistake the apostolic church sought the guidance of the Spirit as in the council of Jerusalem (Act. 15: 8-21) and sought enlightenment from God as in the case of Cornelius (Acts. 10). It is during the act of worship that the community at Antioch was directed to depute Paul and Barnabas for the work the Spirit had envisaged for them. All through the toils and struggles of the apostles as evinced from the numerous pages of the Acts, God was their strength and refuge and they had no other interests to serve than that of fulfilling the mission God has given them.

The communities of the early church met to worship together, to experience the communion at the breaking of the bread (1 Cor. 11: 17-34), to strengthen the bonds of mutual concern and they felt they were one on account of their allegiance to Christ and his Spirit. They gathered together to restore and strengthen their mutual bonds with one another and with God, through Christ Jesus in the Spirit. The apostolic community in Jerusalem was so much centered on God that the Apostles withdrew themselves from material preoccupations in order to devote themselves wholeheartedly to prayer and the service of the word (Acts 6:4). The greatest service the early church had to offer to the communities of believers was to enable them to come together and call God "Abba", Father.

The Church of the catacombs and the martyrs

All the evidence we get from the catacombs bear witness to the fact that the christians of the period after the tradition of the apostles continued to assemble themselves to pray and to worship. The Roman catacombs still proclaim this fact in an undeniable manner. Those who took refuge in the catacombs and the martyrs all over christendom had no other motivation than the inner joy which the allegiance to Christ provided them with. They had to

sacrifice their name, fame, wealth, health and life itself in order to keep themselves attached to the way Christ has shown them. The church itself had no wealth or position in order to be preoccupied with them and there were no prelates who would seek its glory because the church was held in contempt by the great ones of the society. The church of this period found its strength and vitality from its allegiance to Christ. The joy of the Spirit experienced in the midst of persecutions sustained them. Their life in the presence of God and in anticipation of eternity was their chief preoccupation when the life on earth was so very uncertain and few things covetable were available to them. The liturgies of the church took their origins from this period. They were evolved in the various communities in order to sustain and foster their prayer life. For the Christians of this period prayer was not merely an elevation of their heart and minds but of their whole lives which found little relish in the attractions of the world. The martyrs were bearing witness to the supremacy of one's life in God and attachment to Christ. But for their lively awareness of Christ and the firm hope in the resurrection they would not have persevered in the face of agonising sufferings and death. Thus during this period also prayerfulness was the core of the church.

The church and monasticism

Monasticism began to develop during the period of persecutions itself among the christians who had to flee from the agents of the empire. Soon after the period of the great persecutions monasticism of the desert began to be evolved into a cenobitic form both within and outside the limits of the desert. Monasticism was an eloquent witness of the deep desire of the elite Christians to devote themselves whole heartedly to the affairs of God. The totality of dedication that was possible during the period of martyrdom was realised through monasticism in later centuries. In monasticism they could practise a self-consuming love which involved their whole selves. These monks were not a splinter group of the church who broke away from the general community but they lived in mutual dependence and contributed to the different needs of both. The monks were witnesses of God as well as spokesmen of the people before God. They were the embodiment of the praying core of the church. If the church remained anchored on God during the period of the

dislocation caused by the Barbarian invasion, the God-centred life of the monks had contributed much towards it. People were saved from total submersion in physical and material affairs for their own sake. The stark reality of the invisible world was constantly made manifest to them by the existence of monks.

Monasteries have contributed towards the maturing of liturgies and have attracted the common people to relish their magnificence and enhancing features. The liturgies developed sustained and lived by the monks have been the source and norm of faith for the faithful. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (the norm of prayer was the norm of belief). During this period the monks have permeated and even dominated the church through their prayerful existence and the eminent persons they have given to all the ranks of the hierarchy. The basic awareness that the church was a community gathered around God must have been the reason for the exclusive importance of the monks during this time. The people felt they were gathered around God through the medium of the monks.

The eclipse of prayer and the emergence of structure

After Constantine embraced Christianity Caesar and the things of Caesar began to play an undue role in the affairs of the People of God. The goodwill of the kings and affluence brought about through their generosity gave the church a different type of treasure to cherish and soon the attention began to be divided and there have been times in the church when the gifts of Caesar were almost the exclusive concern of the rulers of the church. Consequently interest in the things of God began to wane but it never disappeared. The monastic influence still remained strong but they also often succumbed to the temptation of riches, honours and pleasure. The feudal set up of the early middle ages which continued for several centuries, vestiges of which have not completely vanished yet, diverted the attention of the church from a God-centered attitude to wealth and position centered preoccupation. The church had been projecting this image for several centuries and the mission of the church badly misunderstood.

The quest for money and power usually go together and this results in a temptation to exercise power through force. A strong and well organised structure became necessary to contain people by force. In this situation structure became more important than the Spirit. Instead of helping the people to come to the freedom of the children of God, to discern and remain faithful to the Spirit of God it was sometimes even an enemy of freedom and did not encourage the discernment or guidance of the Spirit. All attempts at repairing this situation were not equally happy. If there were aberrations of the Brothers of free spirit, the Albigensians and others, there had been also the penetrating breakthrough of St Francis and St Dominic. They helped the church to come to a renewed concern for the Spirit and the word. But in accordance with the spirit of the times, organised and formal prayers and devotions began to be the sole method of attachment to God and the spontaneity and generosity of the apostolic times were a thing of the past for most of the faithful. The fidelity to the exterior practices and rules of devotion were more important than the interiority fostered from the time of the prophets especially and strongly established by Christ. The church in every way became a 'ruling' church. The monolithic stereotyped Latin liturgy, and the detailed rubrics for its celebration etc. have been the 20th century forms of the same. But the insistence on prayer as well as the grave obligation to participate in the Liturgy was always there. So the image of the church though eclipsed as medium of communion with God was always there.

The rediscovery of the praying church

The deepened self-consciousness of the church manifested through Vat. II, which describes the church as "a sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind". "She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity" (L. G. N. I). This document continues to speak of the mystery of the church describing its relation to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The church has to fulfil God's plan to "dignify men with a participation in his own divine life". "Established in the present time the Church was made manifest by the outpouring of the Spirit". The church will have its glorious fulfilment only in eternity when all will be gathered together with the

Father in the universal Church (n. 2). The Church "grows visibly through the power of God". "All believers have access to the Father through Christ in one Spirit" (cfr. Eph. 2:18). "The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple" (cfr. ICor 3:16; 6:19). "By the power of the gospel He makes the Church grow, perpetually renews her, and leads her to perfect union with her Spouse". "The Church shines forth as a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." (n. 4) "She seeks and experiences those things which are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, where the life of the church is hidden with Christ in God until she appears in glory with her spouse." (cfr. col. 3:1-4) (n. 6) "By communicating His Spirit to his brothers called together from all peoples, Christ made them mystically his own body. In that body, the life of Christ is poured into the believers, who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified" (n. 7) "in order that we may be unceasingly renewed in Him" (cf. Eph 4:23). He has shared with us His Spirit who, existing as one and the same in the head and in the members, vivifies, unifies, and moves the whole body." (n. 7) "Through her Christ communicates grace and truth to all." "Although the church needs human resources to carry out her mission, she is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim humility and self-sacrifice, even by her own example." These citations give enough evidence of the new awareness of the Church about her nature as an agent of union with God for all mankind. Herein her spiritual image has been represented in a very powerful way.

Prayer, the supreme activity of the church

The church was designed and formed by Christ in order to bring God nearer to men, make them feel His loving care for them, and bring them together in His presence and love. The church does not unite people for any other purpose than to unite them to God. She does not serve the needs of the people except to make them feel their supreme need for God and fill the same. All the activities of the church are a preparation for and manifestation of this supreme function. If she is or should be poor it is to bear witness to the fact that she does not have an abiding city here, that all the resources of the world are meant to be used as a means of exercising love.

If the church cannot bring up her members in prayerful communion with God, she has failed to fulfil the real reason of her existence. The hierarchical structure, the laws and enactments, the sacraments and ceremonies, the churches and institutions have no other purpose to serve. This essential aspect has often been overlooked in the past, and even now it is often forgotten in practice. When we say that the church is essentially a praying church we do not mean to say formal prayer is her sole activity but that inner harmony and union with God should guide her whole existence and activity. In modern times the image of the servant church has been brought to prominence along with that of a poor church. But the image of the praying church is not so remarkably projected in the modern world even after the Council, though parts of the document as we have seen above are very eloquent about it. In India, a land of yogis and rsis where the quest for God was supreme the church to a great extent has failed to present herself as means of union with God; instead she is known to be engaged in socially useful activities. So we have been able to attract only the poorest layer of the society, the bread-seekers; and the vast majority of people, the God-seekers, do not look up to the church as capable of offering them any deep spiritual vision or absorbing experience of God. The faithful in general and even the elite who are engaged in the apostolate whether they are laymen, priests or religious, do not give the witness of a profound experience of God and so their work lacks the efficacy it should produce.

In the modern world there is a renewed wave of quest for God in different forms. Young men and women of the affluent world more than ever are in pursuit of transcendence and they are prepared to forego all they have for the 'super knowledge' of God. (Phil. 3:8-9), which they seek often outside the visible precincts of the church. The church which was established through the immolation of God-made-man in order to be a sacrament of union with God has not been sufficiently able to provide them with the answer they look for in the various oriental mysticisms. A similar situation existed during the decline of the Roman empire when they turned to the unusual experiences of the oriental regions and mystery cults. But then the church rose up to the occasion and presented herself as a means of union with God and through Christ. Will she do so now?

The Liberating Church

The Church has always understood her mission as the continuation of the salvific presence and work of Christ in the world. But in various epochs of history this mission of the Church has taken different forms according to the needs of the times, and consequently in varying times and circumstances various aspects of this one and the same mission of the Church have been stressed. Though the mission of the Church is basically one of the liberation of man as it has been historically and objectively effected by the Paschal Mystery of Christ, recently greater emphasis has been given to the liberative role of the Church in the world of today. This has been greatly due to the sociological developments of the present time and the increasing complexity of the life of the modern man. Still whatever may be the activity the Church might undertake in a given time and circumstance, the ultimate reason and explanation for it is to be found in and traced back to the Will and desire of her Divine Founder, Jesus Christ, the one and only liberator of humanity and the God-sent Savior of the world.

Christ the supreme liberator

Christ the Son of God came to the world as the Supreme Liberator, the expectation of all those who waited for liberation from all kinds of misery, helplessness and alienations. While studying the different views on the messianic expectations prevalent among the Jews at the time of Christ, we note that for many the messianic liberation was primarily a deliverance from the political domination of the Romans over the Israelites of Palestine. Some others were hoping for a liberation in terms of conversion of all peoples to the Jewish faith, and several other devout Jewish religious communities were expecting a liberation by which ultimately Jahweh would reward the just and punish the wicked¹.

The message of salvation which Christ preached was related in varying degrees to all these views; but the liberation of man

1. cfr. *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. I (Messiah), pp. 14-16

Christ envisaged extended to wider horizons of human life: the liberation of man was viewed by him in the totality of man's entire existence. It meant political independence, it included economic liberation, it meant psychological and moral emancipation, it meant par excellence the spiritual liberation not merely as a deliverance from sin but also as the deliverance from all the bondages and alienations to which man is subjected as a result of sin both original and personal. Christ aimed at a liberation which meant the liberation of all men and the whole of man. As he is the only mediator between God and man, so too he is the only liberator in the adequate sense of the term.

Now it is this mission of Christ which, as entrusted by him, the Church has to continue and perpetuate in the world till his second coming, the parousia. As Vatican II teaches, "inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ Himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in Judgment, to serve and not to be served"².

Both in the life and works of Christ and of the early Church we can see that man was taken in his totality and not merely as a soul, overlooking his body and material aspects³. But later on as the autonomy and parity of the Church and the State (the Roman Empire) began to be stressed as a result of the Edict of Milan (A. D. 313) and particularly of the Decree of Thessalonica (A. D. 381), the Church began to understand herself as the one which should care primarily for the spiritual life of man, and the material well-being of man was taken as the concern of the State. But the correct approach of the Church is a realistic view of man as spirit in matter, and body enlivened by a spiritual soul, both together making an integral human being created in God's own image and likeness (Gen. 1: 26) and called

2. The Church Today (*Gaudium et Spes* = G. S), no. 3

3. Christ worked many miracles to help man in his material needs and to heal the sick from their bodily ailments; the early Christians cared for the material needs of the poor, widows etc Acts 6:1 ff., Acts: 11:29-30

by Him to share the Divine life, which in a way par excellence is already historically realized in Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

Incarnation and Liberation

It could be well said that man cannot liberate himself since his liberation and attainment of the final destiny is beyond his powers; on the other hand man as man can be liberated only by another man who while remaining a man, still should transcend the limitations of human nature. In other words the structure of man as spirit in matter, a soul in a body, entails liberation of man dependent totally on man and totally also on another person in whose life to share is the vocation of man, that is, God, the triune God. It is from here we have to understand the paramount importance of the incarnation of the Word of God. The event of incarnation reveals man to himself. In the document of Vatican II on the Church in the modern world we read: The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him who was to come, namely, Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear⁴. Christ is the model of the new, the fully liberated man in the comprehensive sense of the word. For, the Council teaches again that everything what is said about Christ as the new man "holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way⁵.

The glorified man Jesus Christ is the proto-type and exemplar of the definitively liberated man. Liberation, therefore, as envisaged and striven after by the Church is to commence with and culminate in Christ, the Word Incarnate who is also the Risen and Glorified Lord.

What is Liberation?

From the background of history of salvation and the Christian point of view we might say that liberation basically

4. G. S. no. 22

5. Ibidem.

and negatively is the deliverance from sin and from all its consequences not only of man but also of the entire creation. The final accomplishment of liberation, so understood, will mean the restoration of everything in Christ, the Supreme Liberator. God wanted all things to be reconciled with Him through Christ (Col.1:19-20). The Church stands and strives after the spiritual and material liberation of man with all its consequences in the religious, moral, intellectual, psychological, social, cultural, political and economic and all other aspects of human life.

In his widely acclaimed book 'A Theology of Liberation' (New York, 1973) the well-known Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez states that the term liberation in the contemporary sense of its application is not found in the recent official documents of the Church⁶.

Gutierrez thinks that the encyclical 'Populorum Progressio' (1967) goes a step further than does *Gaudium et Spes*. In its treatment on the content of the term liberation the encyclical clearly speaks of "building a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from servitude imposed on him by other men or by natural forces over which he has no sufficient control" (no. 47). However Gutierrez laments that this idea was not expanded in the encyclical⁷.

But the theme of liberation was more completely treated in the Medelline Guidelines, the conclusions of the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops held in Medellin, Columbia, in 1968. In an important passage of the text of these conclusions relating to the economic, social and political aspects of liberation it is stated: "It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sent His Son in the Flesh so that He might come to liberate all men from the slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness"⁸.

6. A Theology of Liberation (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1973), pp. 33-34.

7. Ibid.

8. As quoted by Gutierrez in his book p. 110

In the opinion of Gutierrez to have an adequate idea of liberation we have to distinguish "three reciprocally interpenetrating levels of its meaning or three approaches to the process of liberation". Firstly liberation as it "expresses the aspiration of the oppressed people and social classes, emphasising the conflictual aspect of the economic, social and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes"⁹. Secondly liberation of man in the course of history as man assumes conscious responsibility for his own destiny. The third and final level of meaning of liberation is deliverance from sin and admission to communion to God. Concerning this point writes Gutierrez:: the word liberation allows for another approach leading to the Biblical sources which inspire the presence and action of man in history. In the Bible Christ is presented as the one who brings us liberation. Christ the Saviour liberates man from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression. Christ makes man truly free, that is to say, he enables man to live in communion with him; and this is the basis for all human brotherhood"¹⁰.

Gutierrez warns that these three levels of meaning of liberation are not to be understood as three parallel or chronologically successive processes, but only as three levels of meaning of a single, complex process which finds its deepest sense and its full realization in the saving work of Christ.

A Retrospection.

Now we might very frankly put a question before us; was the Church all throughout the past 20 centuries of her existence conscious of her mission to work for a total liberation of man in the sense of this term as we have seen it just above? To be honest, I think, we have to admit that in the past, as we have already hinted above, there has been an exaggerated stress and an almost one-sided emphasis on the spiritual liberation of man which gave the ordinary Christian an impression that in the execution of her mission the Church was not very much concerned with the material needs and problems of day to day human life. The fact that man can work out even his spiritual liberation only

9. A Theology of Liberation, p. 36.

10. Id. p. 37.

through the instrumentality of his material body was not taken serious, since often body was considered more a hindrance than a help for man to come closer and closer to God to establish communion with Him.

But since the past two decades, especially after the second world war and in the light of the theology that developed during that period, things have been changed considerably. The Church officially teaches that material progress has to contribute towards the spiritual liberation of man, since the spiritual liberation, though it is the primary and most important one in God's plan, will be only the last in its historical realization in the lives of concrete individual human beings and of peoples at large. As St Augustine has put it, what is first in the plan will be only the last in its execution.

From what has been said above, it may be clear that the present day endeavour of the Church is for a total liberation of man. Since the totality of the mission of Christ is explained by the Second Vatican Council¹¹ in terms of a three-fold ministry, here below an attempt is made to explain the liberative mission also of the Church bringing it under the same 3 ministries:

1. Liberation from ignorance & illiteracy through the prophetic ministry of the Church.
2. Liberation from slavery, bondage and all sorts of alienations through the Church's ministry of guidance and leadership,
3. Liberation from sin through the Church's ministry of the word and sacrament.

Liberation through the Prophetic ministry.

The primary task of the Church is to teach all peoples and nations to observe all the commands Christ gave his dis-

11. 'Lumen Gentium' nos. 25, 26 & 27, speaks of the mission of the bishops, and therefore of the Church itself as the continuation of the mission of Christ in this manner of a three-fold ministry. For further details cfr. *Sacramentum Mundi* Vol. II (Ecclesiastical Authority), pp. 133-139.

ciples (Mt. 28: 19-20). Obviously the object of this prophetic or teaching ministry is the content of revelation made by Christ and the good news of his paschal mystery. Christ revealed the love of the Father for man and the world (Jn. 3: 16). The primary goal of the ministry of teaching of the Church is after the example of Christ to make the love of God known in the world. As the Second Vatican Council puts it, "a true education aims at the formation of the human person with respect to his ultimate goal¹² and this goal is to know God and Christ whom He has sent (Jn. 17:3). It is by the exercise of her prophetic ministry the Church has to liberate man from his ignorance, ignorance about God, ignorance about his own fellow men, ignorance about the world and ignorance about himself.

Conscientisation. In connection with the theme of liberation these days we hear often about conscientisation¹³. Conscientisation is not merely to make people conscious of their actual situation of oppression and misery as well as their human dignity and exalted vocation, but it is also a method of liberating man from such situations helping him to find out ways and means to amiliorate his status. In a country like ours where about 70% of the population is illiterate and only 2.6% are Christian the prophetic ministry of the Church gets greater importance than in countries where the situation is very different. In India even over the Christians fatalistic ideas exert great influence.

Many people still think and act as if to be in the subhuman and miserable conditions of life in which they live, is their fate and nobody can help them to get out of this situation. They feel powerless and helpless to change this situation. It is in such context conscientisation has to play a very remarkable role to make such people aware of their actual situation, the vocation to which they are called by God and to give the hope and encouragement to change the situation for better. Conscientisation means all these and as such it is a part of the ministry of teaching of the Church.

12. Vatican II Declaration on Education (G. E.) no. 1.

13. cfr. Examiner (Bombay), 25th August 1973, pp. 529-530.

There is no question of first humanising man and then to convey him the message of salvation. On the other hand both these are to go hand in hand, as a mutually interpenetrating process which progresses in both the aspects simultaneously; for, in the last analysis we can easily note that creation of man and his salvation is willed by God by one and the same act. The distinctive character of creation and salvation is not to be sought in juxtaposed activities either of God or of man, but in their being united both in the act of God and in the person of man: a human person is either being redeemed or not being redeemed in the course of each and every moment of his human existence.

Liberation through guidance and leadership.

These days we hear time and again, especially in Seminars, consultations, study groups etc. much being spoken about the liberation of the oppressed, down-trodden and so on. To take just two examples I may mention 'The Asian Seminar on Religion and Development' held at the National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore from the 16th of July till the 4th of August 1973, and the 'All India Consultation on Evangelization' held at Patna from the 3rd till the 8th of October 1973. Both these very important gatherings discussed in detail the role of the Church in liberating man from all kinds of oppression and alienations he is subject to. In the concluding statement of the above-mentioned Asian Seminar the 84 participants coming from various countries expressed in strong terms their solidarity with the oppressed when they declared: We share the hopes, the aspirations and the anguish of our fellowmen in Asia who are crushed by poverty, ignorance, overpopulation, natural calamities, unjust social, political, economic and military structures and an international system of trade and aid controlled by powerful exploiting nations and groups which result in growing oppression and suffering for an increasing number. We express our solidarity with millions of people, injured, bereaved, separated and imprisoned as a result of wars and struggles for justice in Vietnam, in the Philippines, India, Bangla Desh, Pakistan and the Middle East, with the liberation movements struggling for the rights and dignity of their peoples in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde and with those suffering from discrimination such as tribals and harijans in our own countries. We

express our admiration for the people all over the world who in a spirit of brotherhood have had the courage to protest publicly, often at the great sacrifice, against such situations of violence and injustice¹⁴.

Also in the Declaration of the All-India Consultation on Evangelization we read: Liberation and development are part and parcel of Evangelization. The anguish and aspirations of the two hundred and twenty million people living below subsistence level are a call to the Church to transform her institutions, which at times, perhaps unconsciously, have been instrumental in supporting the oppressive structures of society. Christ came as a Saviour of mankind. Through his death and resurrection he liberated man from every kind of bondage. This means liberation not only of the oppressed, but also of the oppressor and the agents of liberation. It involves the liberation of whole man and of all men. After the example of Christ, his Church too must forego prestige, status and financial security, and even be called to greater sacrifices, in order to continue His mission... Church authorities should fully encourage and support those who are called by the Spirit to special tasks of liberation and development among the poor and the oppressed¹⁵.

No compromise

These statements are just a few examples for the growing awareness in the thinking people in the Church strongly advocating that the attempts of the Church to liberate man should include also ways to eradicate the many injustices, alienations and the institutional violence of political and socio-economic systems to which often men are subject both as individuals and as a collectivity. In denouncing such injustices and alienations the Church has to take a very strong and uncompromising stand as did St John the Baptist before Herod (Mc. 6:18). As the Patna Consultation has clearly and daringly stated in its declaration: The Church in India should realize that a part of her prophetic role is to denounce the evils of the society and sometimes even protest against the bottlenecks, structureblocks and corruption in

14. New Leader (Madras), 12th August 1973, p. 1 Cols. 4-5,

15. New Leader (Madras), 4th November 1973, p. 1 Cols. 3-4.

administration. Whatever risk this may involve, the Church must always, without equivocation, take a stand with the oppressed, contrary to any tendency of aligning herself with oppressive structures¹⁶.

However, this does not mean that the Church should get into active politics of the country, or much less side with political parties. Nor does it say that the Church should not seek after solutions of social and political injustices by persuasions and negotiations¹⁷.

Identification with the poor & Oppressed

In order to liberate man from the yoke of oppression and the pangs of poverty and from all their consequences, it is not enough that the Church sympathizes with the poor and oppressed and gives financial aid or undertake social activities of self-help or welfare programmes, but beyond all these which are of course very necessary and urgent in many cases, the Church should identify herself with the poor, the oppressed, the needy and the suffering. One of the chief tasks of the Church as a liberator in this realm is to make this identification of herself with the oppressed and needy without stooping down on them with an air of condescension and a sense of superiority. On this point the above-mentioned Declaration of the Patna Consultation makes a very pertinent remark: The entire Christian community is challenged to identify itself with the poor and oppressed not merely through sympathy, but through a change of life-style and through-commitment to concrete action¹⁸.

One can ask in utter sincerity and without any prejudice whether always the Church has been on the side of the poor and the oppressed? Whether she has always identified with the needy

16. Ibid. cols. 4-5.

17. We may just recall the contracts and agreements the Holy see made in recent years with the East European countries and the satisfactory results achieved in the same, safeguarding a modus vivendi for the Christians in those lands.

18. New Leader (Madras), 4th November 1973, p. 1. col. 4.

and the have-nots? It is an almost admitted fact that this has not been the case for various reasons whether these reasons are justifiable or not. It is not the duty of the present-day Christians to sit in judgement on the actions of the Christians and of the Church in the past. But an objective evaluation of the past should help the present-day Christian community to have a better and irreproachable approach to liberate the modern man. Since two or three decades in the Latin American society the Church is bent on liberating the oppressed from the exploitation of the rich.

Now People are getting an ever-growing awareness that only the Church can give a lasting inspiration and an effective motivation for a radical change in society which, without rebellion, revolt or blood-shed can put an end to the exploitation of the poor and liberate the oppressed from the traditional structure of the existing society¹⁹.

Liberation from sin through the ministry of sanctification

The liberation of man, if taken adequately, is not to be confined to the material realm only, as he is a rational creature, a spirit living in body. A Man, as created in God's own image and likeness and called by Him to divine communion, but still in the historical situation of the fallen status of being subject to sin and death, needs a spiritual liberation, liberation from sin.

Liberation of man from sin and admission to communion with God could be properly understood only in the light and background of the history of salvation as centered in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. A human person thus liberated becomes the embodiment and expression of the total biblical content of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The Liberation of mankind effected in Christ is the total liberation of man.

19. The book of Gustavo Guttierrez 'A Theology of Liberation' is an excellent example; see also 'Towards a Theology of Liberation', *Examiner* (Bombay), September 1, 1973, pp. 545-546,

Today we see more and more clearly the silver line of unity pervading all through God's designs as realized in the works of creation, redemption and sanctification of man. It is the same God who creates, redeems and sanctifies as it is the same man who is created, redeemed and sanctified. This does not mean a rejection of the distinctiveness of these 3 moments of God's activity, but it only stresses the need of a unified understanding of God's salvific action.

Christ the Proto-type and Exemplar of the liberated man

Liberation of man is finally directed towards and aimed at the eternal salvation of man which will culminate and continue in the direct vision (beatific vision) of God and in the sharing of God's own life. In the most perfect realizable form this sharing in of God's life has historically taken place in the case of the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ. What has happened in the case of Christ is on the one hand the condition of the possibility of the sharing in the life of God by every human being, and on the other the proto-type and pattern of every other sharing in of God's life²⁰.

Now we might ask ourselves: How does the Church liberate man from sin? This question cannot be answered adequately without asking and answering first: what is sin? In the biblical background sin is ultimately an infidelity²¹ against God who invites man to commune with Him not merely as an individual but as a member of a community.

"It has pleased God to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness. He therefore chose the race of Israel as a people unto Himself" (L. G. no. 9). As the salvation has a social dimension so too every sin of man as a creature with a social nature has an impact on others. In sin, therefore, man rejects not only God's offer of participation in the Divine

20. Cfr. *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. V (Salvation), pp. 416-419.

21. 'Sin', J. L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*, pp. 817-821.

life but also rejects communion with men. This refusal for communion with God and fellowmen could be revoked only by a return of man to God and to his fellowmen. As Gutierrez remarks, "salvation is the communion of men with God and the communion of men among themselves"²². Man's liberation from sin could be thus described as a return of men to God and men. This return to God begins when man places again faith in God; for faith in God is the first step of man's liberation from sin²³. But liberation from sin will not be completed by faith alone. Man can understand his actually miserable situation of sin only when his mind will be illumined by the word of God. It is the word of God which convicts man of his sins²⁴. Man as a faithful and recipient of the word of God can bring his liberation from sin to its fulness only by means of the sacraments.

This new life which begins to blossom in the man redeemed by Christ through his word, is brought to perfect growth by the sacraments. The sacraments effect and accomplish in man the entire mystery of the redemptive work of Christ in a symbolic way. That is to say What has historically happened in the life of Christ, the natural Son of God, is effected in a sacramental way in the life of every follower of Christ²⁵.

Conclusion

Here it should be noted that the God-given mission of the Church to preach God's word (Mt. 28:19-20) and to celebrate the sacraments, especially the Eucharist (Lk. 22:19-20) until the

- 22. A Theology of Liberation, p. 151.
- 23. Mc. 1:16 call to repentence and belief in the Gospel of Christ.
- 24. Word of God addressed to Saul through Samuel (1 Samuel 13: 13).
Word of God addressed to David Through Nathan (2 Samuel 12: 7).
- 25. Mt. 4:4 - Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.
Jn. 6:63 - the words of Jesus are life; Jn. 6:68 - Christ has words of eternal life. All these and many similar texts show that word of God is the genuine source of the real life of man.

Parousia of the Lord Jesus are essential functions for the very existence of the Church in the world. The Church itself comes into being and is constituted in a given time and place by the preaching of the word of God and the celebration of the sacraments (L. G. no. 7). The liberating Church is, therefore, the self-emerging and self-constituting Church. It is the community of those who are thus liberated and made the children of God (Gal. 4:6; 5:1, 13) and a community of the saints. The liberating activity of the Church is for her, therefore, the inner law of her self-existence, and to neglect the work of liberation from sin will be self-destructive.

This communion in the life of God begins, progresses and reaches its climax only in and through fellowship with men. That is, this communion with God is concretely effected already in this world through the Church and her sacraments. What is effected here on earth on a sacramental level is brought to its perfection in glory in heaven.

As the theologians would say what is grace here on earth is the reality of glory in heaven. The fully liberated man, and this will happen only as a result of death which sets a seal on the process of liberation, will share in the glory of the Risen and exalted Lord. And this union of all men with Christ in the glory of His Risen Life is the goal of the liberating Church.

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Image of the Church in the New Testament

The Church must constantly reflect upon its real existence in the present with reference to its origins in the past, in order to assure its existence in the future. For the ground of its existence, the Church remains permanently dependent on God's saving act in Jesus Christ, which is valid for all time. The Church listened in faith to the Word of God, as given definitely by Jesus Christ and as repeated through the human words of the New Testament Writings. The fact that these human words are the original testimony of God's Word of revelation makes the New Testament Writings incomparable and unrepeatable. All other testimony in the tradition of the Church, however profound or sublime, does nothing but circle round this original testimony of God's word, interpret, explain and apply the original message according to constantly changing historical situations. Therefore the New Testament Writings are theologically normative for our understanding of the image of the Church.

Enormous tasks and problems confront the Church today, which is part of the changed and changing world and which claims to exist for this world. It cannot face these problems properly, if it remains a prisoner of its own theories and prejudices. It is quite possible that the Church becomes a prisoner of the image it has made for itself at one particular period in history. Every age has its own image of the Church, arising out of a particular historical situation. In every age a particular view of the Church is expressed by the Church in practice, and given conceptual form by the theologians of the age. At the same time there is a constant factor in the various changing historical images of the Church, something which survives the images that vary. This constant factor however in the history of the Church and of its understanding of itself is only revealed in change. Its identity exists only in variability, its continuity only in changing circumstances, its permanence only in varying outward appearances. If we want to discover and to be true to the 'essence' of the Church, which is something dynamic, rather than something static and rigid, we must study carefully the changing historical images of the Church.

This is especially true of the images of the Church in the New Testament. The New Testament does not begin by laying

down a doctrine of the Church, which has then to be worked out in practice. It presents the Church, first of all, as a reality, a happening or as an historical event existing in concrete forms and projecting concrete images. Reflection upon it comes later. Only by studying the different images of the Church in the New Testament, can we catch hold of the real essence of the Church, which should take very concrete forms and project specific images relevant to our times and places.

The history of the Church and its self-understanding began not after but in the New Testament. Therefore the New Testament Writings give us the first decisive phases of the history of the Church and its self-understanding which is indeed complex. The different images of the Church arise in the New Testament itself.

The different emphases and perspectives, tensions and contrasts which we can see in the Ecclesiology of subsequent centuries, reflect to a very large extent, the different emphases and perspectives, tensions and contrasts in the New Testament itself.

Within the New Testament itself we have so many different images of the Church. There is no doubt that those images of the Church which throughout the Centuries have been charismatic in character can appeal more to the great Pauline Epistles and the Johannine Writings while those images of the Church in which office takes precedence can lean more on the Acts and the Pastoral Epistles.

It is not correct to disassociate the different images of the Church in the New Testament by simply gathering together different ecclesiological data sometimes even conflicting, setting them side by side, without finding a deeper unity in the context of the writings as a whole. Nor is it justified to harmonize artificially the different New Testament images of the Church, by keeping to the apparently smooth surface of the texts instead of recognising the contrasts that exist and probing seriously to the bottom of them. In studying the different images of the Church in the New Testament one has to make an effort to make out through the many voices of the witnesses, their unanimous testimony to Jesus Christ and his community and this unanimity is to be found only through the multiplicity of the witnesses¹.

The New Testament Church, beginning with its origins in Jesus Christ, is already the Church in the fulness of its nature.

1) Cf. H. Kung, *The Church*, London 1968, p. 18.

Therefore it is the original design of the Church. The New Testament Message, as the original testimony, is the highest court to which appeal must be made in all the changes of history. This does not mean that we have to copy it today slavishly, without any regard to the lapse of time and our constantly changing situation. But, it means that we have to translate the original design, reflected in the different images, into modern terms.

The Kingdom of God

The starting point of any study of the image of the Church in the New Testament is the preaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God. The lapidary phrases in Mk 1:15 are a telling summary of what Jesus really intended: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel". All exegetes agree that 'the approaching Kingdom of God' is the centre and the horizon of Jesus' preaching and teaching.

The Basic features of the Kingdom

The fundamental characteristics of this Kingdom of God is evident from the Gospels.

Eschatological

First of all, it is essentially eschatological i. e. the fully realized, final and absolute reign of God at the end of time which as an event is now 'at hand' (Mk 1:15). Its eschatological character is evident from the historical setting of Jesus' preaching² and from the details of the preaching itself³.

Sovereign act of God

Secondly, it is a sovereign act of God himself for the realization of which man may pray⁴. The coming of God's reign is a miraculous event, which will be brought about by God alone⁵. The images of admission and exclusion, reclining at table⁶ of eating and drinking⁷ etc., portray the Kingdom as a saving benefit in the future, of which God alone can dispose.

- 2) Note the eschatological call to repentance and baptism of John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus.
- 3) Note the expressions 'is at hand' (Mk 1:15); 'has come upon you' (Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20), 'will come' (Lk 22:18).
- 4) Mt. 6:10; Lk. 11:2 5) Cf. R. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. I, London, N.Y. 1952, p. 4.
- 6) Mt. 8:11; Lk. 13:29 7) Lk. 14:15; 22:18

Religious Kingdom

Thirdly, it is a purely religious kingdom. This is evident from the fact that Jesus is always at pains to refute the misapprehensions of the people and especially of his disciples to the contrary. He rejects any splendid earthly expectations⁸ and the pursuit of positions of honour in the kingdom⁹. Peter is rebuked for his failure to understand Jesus' way of suffering¹⁰.

Saving event

Fourthly, the Kingdom of God is a saving event for sinners. Its message is one of salvation, peace and joy. It is a real good news - *evaggelion* (Mk. 1: 15). Even when threats and warnings are used, they are not an end in themselves, but are intended to point to the great offer of God's grace which precedes judgement. God's grace and mercy and forgiveness are preached to all and are made visible in Jesus' actions. the revelation of God's love for sinners is a sign of the coming reign of God.

Conversion and Faith:

Finally the Kingdom of God demands on the part of man a radical decision for God: "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk. 1.15). Though living in the world, man must wait for the coming of God's reign and give his heart finally and solely to God: not to money and possessions¹¹, nor to rights and honours¹² nor even to parents and family¹³. The demand is not only in the realm of external acts which can be codified as laws, but also in that of inward disposition: murder as well as anger, adultery as well as evil desires etc.¹⁴. God wants the entire man in this dicision for God. This is what is involved in the 'repentence' (metanoeite Mk 1: 15) which the Kingdom of God demands of man. It is not an outward repentance in sack cloth and ashes but a radical and total inward change of the entire man, a change of direction or orientation towards God. This is what is involved in faith too ("believe in the Gospel - Mk 1: 15) which comes to the same as 'repentence'. The repentance (metanoia) being the initial change, faith is the on-going movement by which one opts to live this new orientation. It is interesting to note

8) Lk. 19:11;23:42; 24:21 9) Mk. 10:35-45 par.

10) Mk. 8:31-33 par. 11) Mt 6:19-21, 24-34.

12) Mt. 5:39-41; Mk. 10:42-44 13) Lk. 14:26f; Mt. 10:34-59

14) Note the expression "You have heard that it was said to the men of old... But I say to you..." showing the specificity of the new Kingdom in the section Mt 5:17-48.

that in early christian tradition 'metanoia' (conversion) gradually is substituted by 'pistis' (faith)¹⁵ This shows the fundamentally challenging and demanding character of the Kingdom of God.

The Church:

The Church is a post - Resurrection phenomenon. Not until Jesus is risen from the dead do the first christians speak of a "Church". But by his preaching and ministry, Jesus laid the foundations for the emergence of a post-resurrection Church. Jesus revealed the Kingdom of God, promised for the future, in the present through his person and ministry. This revelation confronted men with the hour of decision, the decision for belief or unbelief for repentance or non-repentance. Though his call and message were universal, the effect of this message was a divisive one and those who accepted his message in faith are decisively distinguished from those who rejected it as far as the Kingdom of God is concerned. Thus gradually emerged the Church in and through whom the Kingdom of God will be realized and therefore projecting an image corresponding to the basic characteristics of the Kingdom.

Church: Eschatological People of God

Corresponding to the eschatological nature of the Kingdom of God the Church in the New Testament projects the image of the eschatological people of God. This is especially evident in the Gospel according to Matthew. The Church in Mathew seems to be conscious of being the universal redeemed community of Jesus Christ, as the New Israel which replaces the particularistic and legalistic and nationalistic Old Israel¹⁶. Note the words of Jesus: "Therefore I say to you that God's reign will be taken away from you (old Israel) and given to a people yielding the fruits thereof" (Mt 21:41). The people who now takes the place of the old Israel is no longer an ethnic, national reality, but a spiritual unity, an association of men who "yield fruits of divine rule." The image of fruitbearing shows that here Matthew was thinking of the Church, for he applies various sayings and parables of Jesus employing this metaphor paranetically to his

15) 'Metanoia' and 'Metanoiein' occur in Mt 7 times, Mk 3 times, Lk 14 times, Acts 11 times, Paul 5 times and in Jo not at all, while *pistis* and 'pisteuein' occur in Mt 19 times, Mk 19 times, Lk 20 times, Acts 52 times, Paul 196 times and in Jo 108 times.

16) Cf. W. Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel, Studien zur Theologie des Mattausevangeliums*, 1959, p. 200.

christian readers¹⁷, while the unbelieving Israel is burdened with the curse of barrenness (Mt. 21:19). The "people" is, therefore, the true 'people of God' which is being formed on a new foundation. This new people of God, this special community of Jesus (Mt 16:19) is throughout the Gospel strongly contrasted with the unbelieving Israel which persisted in the old legalism and 'hypocrisy'¹⁸.

The same image of the Church as the 'People of God' emerges in the Pauline Epistles too. According to Paul, on the one hand, of Israel as the people of God the promises hold good, and on the other, judaism remains unbelieving in regard to the heir to the promises in the absolute sense, Christ (Gal 3:16). From this dialectic there emerges Paul's concept of the Church as the true people of God, which equally comprises believers from Israel and the Gentiles and has become "in Christ" a totally new unity: "There is neither jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). So it is clear that for Paul the Church projected the image of a new people of God which has taken the place of the old. Though it is formed on the basis of the promises of blessings made to the old, it stands on an entirely new foundation, belief in Jesus Christ.

Church: a work of God

Corresponding to the Kingdom of God as a sovereign act of God, the Church in the New Testament projects an image of a 'work of God'. The origins of the Church do not lie only in the intention and the message of Jesus in the pre-Easter period, but in the whole history of Jesus' life and ministry, that is in the entire action of God in Jesus Christ, from Jesus' birth, his ministry and the calling of the disciples, through to his death and resurrection and the sending of the Spirit to the witnesses of his resurrection. Therefore the Church was from the first moment of faith in the resurrection seen as something given by God. As a work of God it was regarded as essentially different from other human groups and communities and consequently took on similarly a very different form. This stress on the Act of God working in and through Christ is revealed in the expressions 'Church of God' (ecclesia tou theou)¹⁹ 'Church of Christ' (ecclesia tou Christou)²⁰ 'people of God' (laos tou theou) etc.

17) Cf. Mt 7:15-20, 13:8, 23, 26

18) Cf. Mt 5:20-48, 8:10, 11f; 15:7ff; 21:31f; 22:1-10, 23

19) 1 Thes. 2:14; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; Gal. 1:13

20) Gal. 1:22, Rom. 16:16

The Church: a charismatic community

The Church as 'the work of God' is brought out very well in the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. The descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) is for Luke a fundamental event for the whole Church. It is the moment of its endowment with the "power from on high"²¹, which alone qualifies it for its task, its salvific mission in the world. It is this endowment that gives the Church the image of its supernatural mode of existence. The charismatic manifestations of the Spirit in the Pauline communities are quite evident from the apostle's concrete instructions for Corinth (1 Cor 12-14). The gift of the Spirit was perceptible in the other Pauline Churches such as in Thessalonica (1 Thes 5:19), Galatia (Gal 3: 2-5) and Rome (Rome 12: 5-8). "God has given us the Spirit" becomes apparently a fixed formula of the early christian catechism (1 Jo 3: 24; 4:13)²². Scarcely any thought intensified the Church's eschatological awareness and feeling of solidarity so much as the conviction of having received from God the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who guides the early Church and its missionaries²³ and speaks to the Churches²⁴. The consciousness of having received the Holy Spirit from the exalted Lord as the first fruits and pledge of redemption²⁵ distinguished the early church from other contemporary communities, be it jewish or gentile.

The Church: a worshipping and praying community

The religious character of the Kingdom of God is reflected in the image of the Early Church as a worshipping and praying community.

As a result of the invitation at the end of Peter's Pentecost discourse: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (Acts 2: 40) 3000 were baptized and the first christian community of Jerusalem came into existence (Acts 2: 41). Of this community, born at the Pentecost we have a very precious description in Acts 2: 41-5: 42²⁶. The image of this community as a worshipping

21) Lk: 24:49 22) Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament*, p. 16. 23) Acts 5:3, 3; 8:29, 39, 9:31; 10:19; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6f. 24) Apoc. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22. 25) Cf. Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13f.

26) Cf. L. Cerfaux, "La Composition de la premiere partie du Livre des Actes, in Recueil Lucien Cerfaux, Vol. II, Gembloux, 1954, 63-91

and praying community is projected specially in the three summary statements in this section, namely Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35 and 5: 12-16²⁷.

The section insists very much on the liturgical aspect of the christian life. Out of the four expressions used to describe the Church in Acts 2:42, two concern this aspect: 'the breaking of bread' and 'prayer'. The liturgical life of the community developed partly in the Temple²⁸ and partly in the houses of the members of the community²⁹. In these private meetings in the houses, "they broke bread" and "partook of food with glad and generous hearts"³⁰. The Apostles had a special role in these meetings³¹. It is under their direction that the christians held their common prayer³² praising and imploring God³³.

Such gatherings in the houses were not limited to the Jerusalem Community. A gathering of the Church in Troas, in which Paul took part when travelling through, is described exactly in the same way. All had assembled on Sunday "to break bread". Paul spoke during the service, broke bread and tasted (food)³⁴

The Pauline community of Corinth also projects the same image of celebrating the "Lord's Supper" (1 Cor 11:20)³⁵. The celebration of the Eucharist was from the beginning the central and common worship of the christian churches. It was peculiar to them in commemoration of their Lord and in fulfillment of his sacred command and intrinsically bound them together.

The image of worshipping community, a community in which liturgical and sacramental life was flourishing is projected also in the Johannine Writings. They understood their worship of God as "Worship in Spirit and Truth, a worship proceeding from a life of fulness of faith, and themselves as true worshippers filled with the Holy Spirit. Their worship was the eschatological culmination of all worship practised until then, transcending even the Jewish service of the temple³⁶. Their pasch replaced and fulfilled the pasch of the jews³⁷, for they possessed the true

27) Cf. H. Zimnemann, "Dae Samelberichte der Apostelgeschichte", Bz 5 (1961), 71-82.

28) Cf. Acts 5:12; 3:11 29) Acts 2:46; 5:42

30) Acts 2:46 31) Cf. Acts 6:4 32) Acts 4:24

33) Acts 2:47; 4:31 34) Acts 20:7, 11

35) Cf. H. Schurmann, "Eucharistiefeier, in LThK III, 1159-62.

36) Cf. Jo 4:21-23 37) Jo 2:13; 6:4; 11:55

paschal lamb, Christ³⁸. In the sacraments they possessed testimonies and vehicles of the continuing redemptive act of Jesus Christ³⁹. It cannot be disputed that the Johannine Church experienced the word of Christ⁴⁰ and the Person of Christ⁴¹ as present in its solemn worship (comprising word and sacrament).

In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Early Church experienced in a unique way the proximity, presence and society of its Lord. Precisely by this it became conscious of its essential difference from the Jewish worshipping community and all pagan religious associations and sacrificial fraternities⁴². The very designation of the Early Christians as 'the saints'⁴³ seems to be also related with a differentiating liturgical life of their own⁴⁴.

The Church: community of the baptized

The Kingdom as a saving event has its counterpart in the image of the Church as the community of the baptized. There is no doubt that the Early Church from the beginning practised and required baptism in the name of Jesus Christ⁴⁵. Baptism was considered to be not a mere rite of reception to incorporate the believer visibly and legally into the community, although this significance too cannot be overlooked⁴⁶. The additional phrase "for the remission of your sins" in Acts 2:38 shows that baptism has a redemptive function. It confers salvation in a fundamental way that provides a foundation so that the recipient can thereby receive all the further gifts and benefits of redemption. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:16). It initiates the individual into a new way of life, the trinitarian life in Christ. This is expressed in Mt 28:19-20 in the words "...baptizing them into (-eis) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....". The Greek particle 'eis' has the dynamic sense of movement towards someone. The person who is baptized belongs to the Trinity of Person whose names are invoked.

38) Jo 19:36; 1:29 39) Cf. 1 Jo 5:6f

40) Cf. Jo 6:63f; 8:31, 51; 14:23f; 17:14, 17 41) Cf. Jo 6:57

42) Cf. 1 Cor 10:16-22 43) Cf. Acts 9:13, 32, 41

44) Cf. R. Schnackenburg, The Church in the New Testament, 43-44

45) Acts 2:38; 10:48; 19:5; 1 Cor 1:13, 15; Jam 2:7

46) Cf. Acts 1:41

Church: Community of the Children of God

Baptism was considered to be a "generation from on High" by which one enters into the sphere of God's life⁴⁷ and it places the individual in the array of the other children of God⁴⁸ who in the First Epistle of John are recognisable as the orthodox and believing community⁴⁹. In defence against the "anti-Christ" this profoundly rooted community consciousness appears: "They went out from us but they were not of us. For if they had been of us they would have remained with us..." (1 Jo 2:19). Baptism is the generation by God which produces children of God⁵⁰. It implants in the believer the "seed of God", that is to say the Word of God vivified by the Spirit, for a life without sin (1 Jo 3:9), and for a true knowledge of God (1 Jo 2:20, 27). The believers as 'children of God' can be recognised by their life of faith in Christ⁵¹ and fraternal love⁵².

Church: Community of Fellowship

The unity and the fraternal spirit of the Early Christians is strongly emphasized by the Acts. The common sharing of the material goods is idealized in the summary statements of the Acts of the Apostles⁵³. But there seems to have been considerable willingness to help and support one another as the examples of Barnabas (Acts 4:36f) and the daily provision for widows (Acts 6:1f) show. All the epistles testify to the profound response evoked by Jesus' call for love⁵⁴. The unity between the different churches is clearly manifested in the great collection that Paul organized in his churches for the 'poor' or 'saints' in Jerusalem⁵⁵.

This unity and fellowship among the Early Christians had ties and grounds that are deeper than that existed in other communities. It is the one God who has called all, the one Lord Jesus Christ to whom all belong, the one Spirit who fills all and united them in the one Body of Christ, the one baptism in which all become one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27f) the one bread of the

47) Cf. Jo 3:3, 5 48) Cf. Jo 1:12f; 1 Jo 3:1f

49) Cf. 1 Jo 2:20; 27f; 3:9f; 5:1f

50) Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *Die Johannesbriefe*, 1953, 155-162

51) 1 Jo 2:22; 4:2f; 5:1 52) 1 Jo 2:9f; 3:14, 23; 4:20f; 5:2

53) Acts 2:44f; 4:32, 34f; 5:12

54) Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, 1965, 217-225

55) Cf. 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:25-27

Eucharist in which all share⁵⁶ that give the Church its unity the spirit of fellowship. Ultimately it is the belief in and confession of their Lord and Messias that bound the christians together in unity. This is expressed in the formula "those who call on the name of the Lord" or its equivalents⁵⁷.

This inner bond between the physically scattered faithful and churches seems to find its finest expression in the greetings of Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians "to the Church of God that is in Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and ours" (1 Cor 1:2). It is this image of unity of the Church that is projected in the Pauline notion of the Body of Christ, in the Johannine teaching about the union of the faithful with Christ and between one another, flowing from the union between the Father and the Son (Jo 17:21,23) in the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews regarding the union of the earthly people of God with the festive gathering in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22f).

This unity and fellowship was not merely spiritual but was extended to concrete daily living involving even the sharing of material goods. This sharing is recommended as a sacrifice which is pleasing to God (Heb 13:16). We have factual examples of it in the corporate life of the first christians and the collection undertaken by Paul for the Jerusalem Church.

In the Church in Jerusalem no one said that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common⁵⁸. It is further explained that the possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds to the Apostles, who made distribution to each as any had need⁵⁹. These were quite voluntary acts, inspired by the love which reigned in the Church. This projects an image of the christian life, which is not compatible with a selfish attachment to earthly possessions and christian communion which affects all planes of life.

The Church: a serving community

The Spirit of sharing and fellowship in the Early Church is the result of the basic character of the Church as a serving

56) 1 Cor 10:17; Cf. also the exhortation of Paul in 1 Cor 1:10-13; 3:4f; 12:4-6; Rom 12:4f; 15:5f; Phil 2:1; Eph 4:1-6; Col 3:14f

57) 1 Cor 1:2; Rom 10:13; Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16

58) Acts 2:44; 4:32 59) Acts 2:45; 4:34-35

community. The spirit of service is the same as the spirit of discipleship of Christ: "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also" (Jo 12:26). The self-sacrifice or self-denial implied in this life of discipleship is illustrated in the parable spoken by Jesus in this connection: "Truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life, loses it, and he who hates his 'life in this world will keep it for eternal life"⁶⁰.

One of the specific images of the Mathean Church is that of the disciples of Christ. This is quite evident from the words missionary of commissioning in Mt 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you....". Baptism initiates the believers to a new way of life of the disciples of Christ who are attached to the person of Christ and follow him imitating his life-style.

Though during the earthly life of Jesus, discipleship or following Christ was reserved to certain individuals⁶¹ after the resurrection of Christ it gets a more enriched meaning, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, applicable to all believers. This change is reflected in the synoptic presentation of Jesus' words to those who follow Christ: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me"⁶². If in Mt it is addressed to his disciples, in Mk it is addressed to the multitude with his disciples and in Lk it is addressed to all in general.

The spirit proper to this 'discipleship' character of the Mathean Church is specified in the Ecclesiastical discourse in Mt. 18. This is done in answer to the question of the disciples "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven"? (Mt 18:1). The fact that the question is in the present tense shows that the Kingdom of heaven is here taken in its initial form as realized in the Church⁶³. The answer is given in sign and words: "And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven'⁶⁴. "Turning" and

60) Jo 12:24-25

61) 12 Apostles; 72 disciples; a great multitude of disciples
Lk 6:13, 17 62) Cf. Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23

63) Cf. J. L. McKenzie S. J. The Gospel according to Matthew,
JBC, 43, 125 64) Mt 18:2-3

“becoming like a child” are the basic conditions of entering the Kingdom. This attitude is explained in v. 4 as ‘a lowering of oneself’. The denial of self⁶⁵ which requires from man a radical conversion – turning towards God is the proper disposition of the faithful in the Church,

In the Johannine Writings also the same disposition is required from the believers as expressed in Jo 3: 3-5 “Unless one is born from above (water and Spirit) he cannot see (enter) the Kingdom of God. It is a radical conversion – turning away from one’s private-self and a total reorientation to the corporate-self of Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, that is the real spirit of the members of the Church. It is the same spirit that is demanded of man in response to the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom by Christ “...repent and believe in the Gospel⁶⁶. It is this spirit that is manifested in the image of the Church as a serving community.

It is this spirit of service that is characteristic also of the leaders of the community. That is why the special ministry in the Church, whatever form it takes, is called by the name of ‘service’ (diakonia’). The nature of the special ministry in the Church is described by Jesus in Mt. 20: 24-28 and parallels. There He contrasts the position of the leaders in the Church with that of the rulers of the nations, who lord it over them⁶⁷. The leaders in the Church are to be servants and slaves who do not impose their will on others but suffer the imposition of the will of others⁶⁸. This is the position that the first among the disciples should consider proper to himself in the Church⁶⁹.

This was the position of Jesus. He has become the servant of all, and the service that is imposed upon him is the supreme sacrifice of life. It should be noticed that the term “ransom” follows the context of service. The ransom means that Jesus describes himself as reduced to the level of a means by which a purpose is achieved for others. The value of his life is determined not by self-assertion or self-aggrandizement, but simply in terms of its value for other persons. Thus the spirit of discipleship, the spirit of service remains an image that is characteristic of the Church of God in the New Testament.

65) Mt 16:24

66) Mk 1:15

67) Mt 20:25

68) Mt 20:26

69) Mt 20:27

Conclusion:

The image of the Church in the New Testament has different emphases and perspectives as reflected in the New Testament. If it has the human and social character of a people of God, it has also the spiritual character of being the work of God and a charismatic community. If it projects the image of a worshiping and praying community, it is the spontaneous expression of the regenerated life of its members as children of God, who are initiated into it through baptism. If it projects the image of a community of fellowship and communion, the inner bond that united them is the personal life of its members in a spirit of discipleship, self-sacrifice and service. In the course of centuries the Church had accretions and additions from the secular milieu which tend to distort its true image. The Church is not an institution to be put on the same level as other institutions. If the Church simply projects an image of a powerful factor in public life, of a cultural or educational force, of a bastion of tradition or the establishment, of a pious pressure group among many pressure groups, of a religion of pious practices and ceremonies, of an institution of strict discipline and rigorous laws, of a most efficient agency of social service, it will defeat the purpose of its existence. Therefore it is of utmost importance that the Church rethinks the image it projects today in the light of the New Testament image.

Underlying the multiplicity of the different faces of the image of the Church in the New Testament, we find the concrete expression of the universal Salvific Kingdom of God realized in Christ. Therefore the Church in the New Testament projects a unique image of Christ's salvific kingdom offering to the rest of the world the same challenge offered by Christ in his earthly life and ministry: "repent and believe in the Gospel."

It is this challenging existence that made the Early Church a community which all the people looked upto, as a result of which the Lord added to their number day by day those who were saved (Acts 2:47). It is the same challenging existence that is demanded of the Church today as at all times and in all places. The Church can do this only if she makes an earnest effort to reproduce in its life relevantly and effectively the basic challenging features of the Kingdom of God as reflected in the New Testament image of the Church.

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